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## Craft a career in concept art

Bram 'Boco' Sels reveals  
the secrets of his  
continuous progression

## Learn texture skills

Add traditional brushstroke  
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Renée Chio reveals the techniques behind her image *Ballerina*

## +plus

- 10 of the best digital images
- Sketch surreal concepts
- Paint fantasy portraits
- Digital Art Master:  
Esben Rasmussen
- and much more!

# Editor's Letter



**JESS SERJENT-TIPPING**  
Deputy Editor

## Welcome to the September issue of *2dartist* magazine!

Have you ever wanted to bring a bit of life to your illustrations? Christopher Peters reveals a cool digital trick to transform your 2D images, which could really spice up your portfolio in an interesting way!

Donovan Valdes and Bram 'Boco' Sels share their industry knowledge and expertise, while Renée Chio divulges the workflow process behind this month's cover image, *Ballerina*.

We've got a whole host of top images, tutorials, and resources to aid and inspire you. Enjoy!

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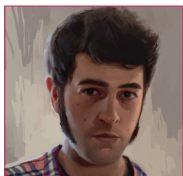
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# Contributors



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Belgium-born Bram 'Boco' Sels is an artist and concept designer who has worked for companies like Ubisoft, Wideshot Entertainment, Marauder Film, Tokkun Studios and Centipede Press.



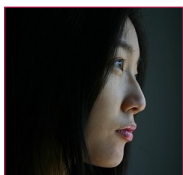
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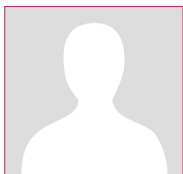
### TRAN NGUYEN

Tran Nguyen is a Georgia-based gallery artist and freelance illustrator. She has worked for clients such as Playboy and McDonald's and has showcased with galleries in California, New York, Spain, and Italy.



### DONGLU YU

Donglu Yu is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft Montreal. She has worked on game titles such as *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed III*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*.



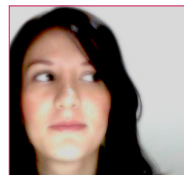
### CHRISTOPHER PETERS

Christopher Peters is a young artist who has dedicated his life to music, history, and digital art amongst other things. He notes that his art defines him as controlled chaos, and he considers himself an eternal student.



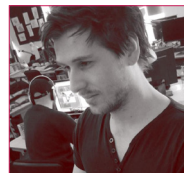
### ANDY WALSH

Andy Walsh is a freelance digital artist and architectural visualiser. He is currently working on his portfolio with a view to working in the entertainment industry. He reveals how to design an industrial scene.



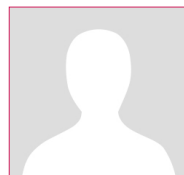
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Sandra started out as a graphic designer and worked for different advertising agencies. Two years ago she began working with concept art, and is currently working on a graphic novel to be released soon.



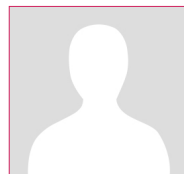
### ESBEN RASMUSSEN

Esben Lash Rasmussen mainly works with conceptual art, character design, illustration and visual development. He is a student at The Animation Workshop in Denmark in his last year.



### RENÉE CHIO

Renée is a freelance animator and illustrator. Her work as a professional has been mainly for animation projects such as feature film, TV shows and animation for live shows.



### WOULD YOU LIKE TO SUBMIT TO 2DARTIST?

We are always looking for tutorial artists, gallery submissions, potential interviewees, writers and more. For more information, please send a link to your work to: [jess@3dtotal.com](mailto:jess@3dtotal.com).



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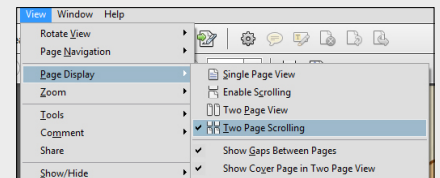
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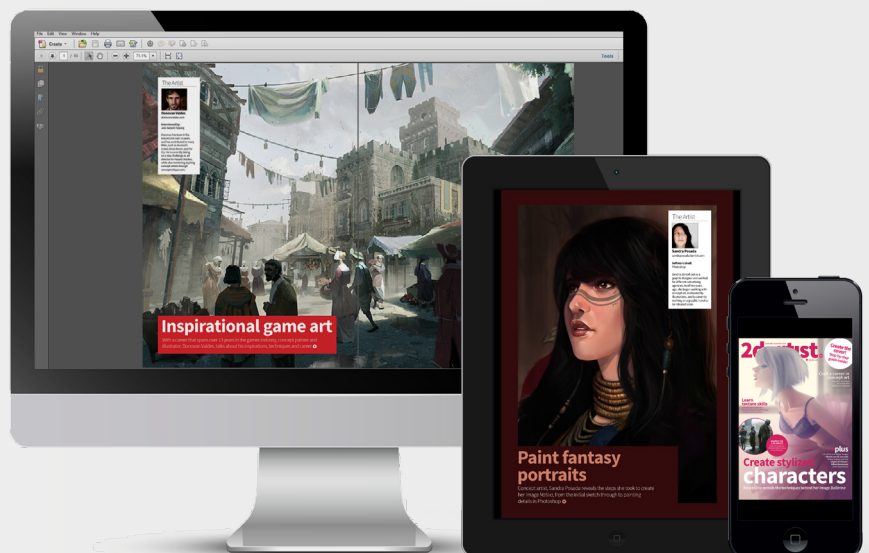
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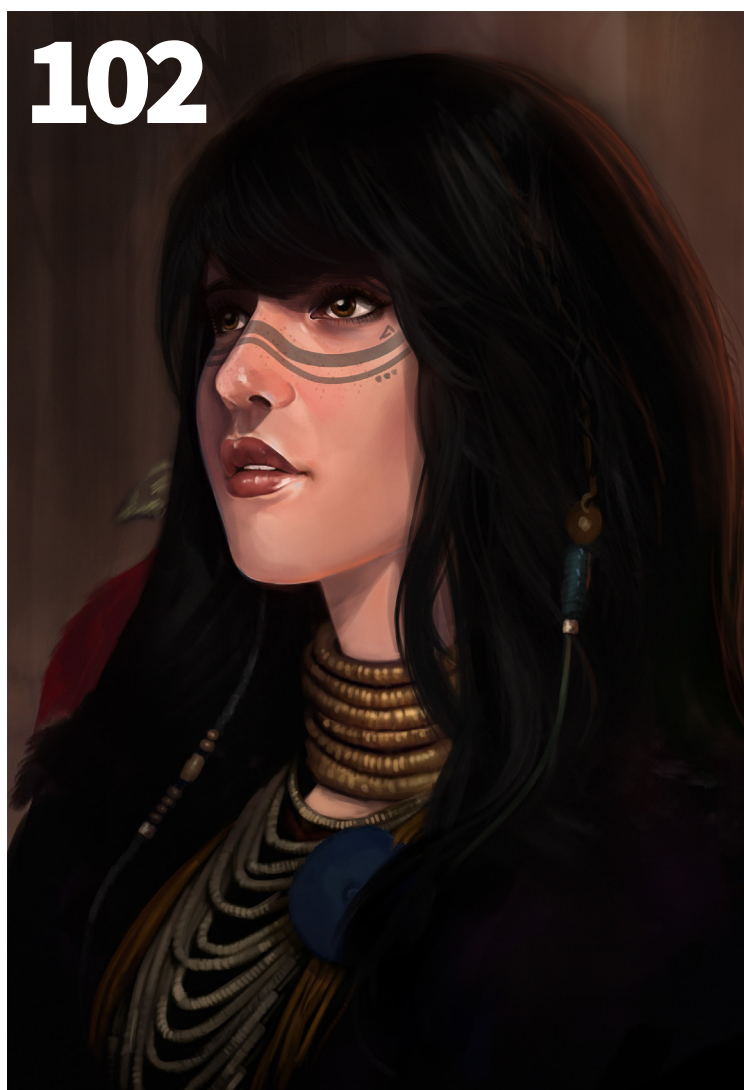
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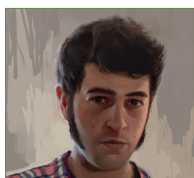
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## The Artist



### Bram 'Boco' Sels

artofboco.com

#### Interviewed by:

Jess Serjent-Tipping

Belgium-born Bram 'Boco' Sels is an artist and concept designer who has worked in the entertainment industry since 2012. He has worked for companies like Ubisoft, Wideshot Entertainment, Marauder Film, Tokkun Studios and Centipede Press. Apart from that he's working as a concept artist for the Belgium based studio GriN on their upcoming indie title *Woolfe: The Red Hood Diaries*.



# Crafting a career in concept art

Bram 'Boco' Sels broke into the industry in 2012 and has already worked for companies such as Ubisoft, Wideshot Entertainment, and Centipede Press. Currently working at indie game studio, GriN, Bram shares the secrets to his growing career, as well as his inspirations and experiences ▶



It all started in the summer of '09, fueled by his love of *Magic: The Gathering* and a dream of one day doing illustrations for them – he thought why not give it a go! So Bram bought himself an Intuos and clumsily started working on his very first digital illustration, a goblin sabotaging a wooden cart.

Bram confesses that seeing it now makes him cringe – “The values are off, the anatomy is crooked and the color is incoherent, but I remember thinking, ‘Hey, I like this, and if I keep doing this I’m bound to get better!’ I even sent it to Wizards Of The Coast, haha, and needless to say I got rejected.” But that determination and way of thinking has landed him work with various companies, including Ubisoft, Wideshot Entertainment, Marauder Film, Tokkun Studios and Centipede Press.

Bram shares his inspirations, techniques and experiences working as a concept artist for the Belgium based studio GriN on their upcoming indie title *Woolfe: The Red Hood Diaries*.

**2dartist:** What was it about the digital tools that made you want to pursue a career in the industry?

**Bram ‘Boco’ Sels:** I had some history as a graphic designer creating websites, posters, CD covers and the likes, so I felt comfortable working in Photoshop. At the time I was also tight on cash, had almost no traditional painting gear (apart from some cheap ►

● Study of a black and white photo © Bram ‘Boco’ Sels



● Boco's workspace



● Boco describes this as 'Get Me Out Of Here!' © Bram 'Boco' Sels









● Another of Boco's study, with a spin  
of his own imagination © Bram  
'Boco' Sels







● A still life study of a skull – because skulls are awesome! © Bram 'Boco' Sels

## “Though I rarely find the time to actually read a book or play a game, I go through at least one audiobook or a Let’s Play per week”

brushes, and five tubes of oil paint to do figure studies with) but I did have Photoshop which seemed to offer endless possibilities without the extra costs.

Looking back at it I used to rely a lot on all the tricks and gimmicks it had to offer. For instance, instead of really looking for reference and manually painting colors, I tried to guess it and fiddle with adjustment layers until it felt right. I think that if I started out traditionally I would have started out with a better understanding of the fundamentals of painting.

**2da:** Where do you draw your inspiration from? What influences your work and motivates you?

**BS:** When I first started out I did a lot of competitions and art challenges. One that comes to mind was the HP Lovecraft challenge on Jon Schindehette’s ArtOrder blog. The idea was to illustrate a non-humanoid creature from the Lovecraft universe

and it really forced you to look into Lovecraftian lore as well as creature anatomy. It was the first art challenge I ever participated in and I got a lot of helpful critique from fellow artists and the judges.

I also remember Jon explaining the importance of inspiration and how and where to look for it. Ever since I have kept a to-do list of books, movies, games, CDs, and so on, that I felt I needed to go through. Though I rarely find the time to actually read a book or play a game, I go through at least one audiobook or a Let’s Play per week. I really feel my inspiration pool has become a lot bigger since.

**2da:** Could you choose one of your favorite past images (that you’ve created) and explain a little about its creation, and why it’s your favorite?

**BS:** My absolute favorite must be *Serves Me Right*. I created it while following the Traditional and Digital art class with Jon Foster and Vanessa Lemen at The Art Department and looking at it now makes me remember that time. It was spring back then and although I was earning almost no money I remember I had that great ‘take-on-the-world’ feeling. It just felt great dedicating all my time to painting during the day and following a class in the evening/night.

Apart from that, *Serves Me Right* also turned out to be a real stepping stone for me. It got me published in *Digital Art Masters: Volume 9* and *Spectrum 21* and has led to some great job opportunities.

**2da:** Do you have any favorite software, techniques or processes that you apply to your artwork, that you would consider your signature style?

**BS:** I think Photoshop has to be my number one tool. It’s what I started out using and what I’m still most comfortable with. I often look for ways to incorporate traditional techniques into it though. Looking at the way traditional painters build their values and colors and trying to mimic those techniques with the tools in Photoshop.

To boost that traditional feel I also work with texture layers a lot. Often I create them myself (with traditional media) and then implement them into my digital work through brushes or overlay layers. Another technique I often tend to use is to start out in black-and-white, focusing on values before concentrating on color.

**2da:** Do you ever practice CG/digital arts as a hobby and experiment with techniques and tools in your ►

## 🕒 Artist Timeline Bram’s career so far

**2009:** During the summer Boco created his first digital painting ever

**2010:** He received second place in a competition on It’s Art Mag

**2011:** His first publication featured in Exotique 7

**2011:** He fought for 3dtotal in Pre-dominance War V

**2011:** He created the backgrounds for an animated short movie

**2012:** Boco’s first paid gig, for a pen and paper RPG called Afterearth: The Fall

**2013:** Followed the Digital & Traditional 201 class at The Art Department

**2013:** Started working for indie game studio GrIN

**2014:** Got accepted into Digital Art Masters 9 and Spectrum 21





● Boco loves turn-of-the-century, foggy street scenes! © Bram 'Boco' Sels

own personal artwork? If not, how else do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?

**BS:** When I'm not on a deadline I'm usually trying to improve my skills. Sometimes through figure or landscape studies, sometimes by goofing around in a different software package like MODO or ZBrush. And when I'm really not in the mood to get my hands dirty or when I'm having an off day and things just don't go as they should, I watch a tutorial or read the Andrew Loomis or James Gurney bibles again.

My girlfriend calls me a vampire, and I can't say I disagree. It's a 24/7 kind of job and it often feels like I'm sitting in a cave hiding away from the light. Good thing I play in a punk-rock band as well. Those guys

force me to get out, play gigs, and drink the night away. They're a bad influence, but don't tell them I said so.

**2da:** What has been your favorite project to work on/ greatest artistic achievement?

**BS:** That has to be the project I'm currently working on, *Woolfe: The Red Hood Diaries*. It's the first game I'm actually involved in making and the team at GriN is just awesome to work with. In the past I usually had to rely on myself to create something, but working on a game like this is a group effort. It feels great to be a part of that and to be able to throw in my two cents. There are some talented people working there and it's amazing to see them bringing a world to life in which some of my designs live. The

entire *Woolfe* universe is so well grounded that I can really picture myself there. It's a blast to delve deeper into that realm and design more characters and environments for it.

**2da:** What would be your perfect project to work on?

**BS:** I'm a big sucker for historically-inspired worlds that set the stage for a fictional story. I would've loved to work on the *Bioshock* franchise for instance. That first game had me so invested in its world that I've been listening to big band swing and jazz ever since. When it came out I even started reading Jules Verne just because I couldn't get enough of that vibe. ►





## ⚡ PRO TIPS

### It's all in the values!

If your painting looks off and you can't really put your finger on what's wrong, chances are the problem is in the values. Try to turn your image to black-and-white and if it still feels wrong your values are probably screwed. Carefully study the direction of the light in your scene and where it's coming from. Compare each element to the others around it and establish how much light it should receive. Wherever planes change direction, lighting should change as well. Planes directly facing the light should be lightest. Also look for reference, as it'll help you understand how different light can change the look and feel of an object.

### Point of interest

It's important to keep your focal point in mind. What is the most important part of your image, and what's your image really about? Try to construct your composition in a way that directs the viewer's eyes towards that point. A great way to do that is through conscious use of light. In a dark environment for instance, you can place a bright light near your point of interest to attract the viewer's attention to it. In a light environment you can do the opposite by placing a dark silhouette against a bright background. Your images will become a lot more readable if you have a clearly defined focal point.

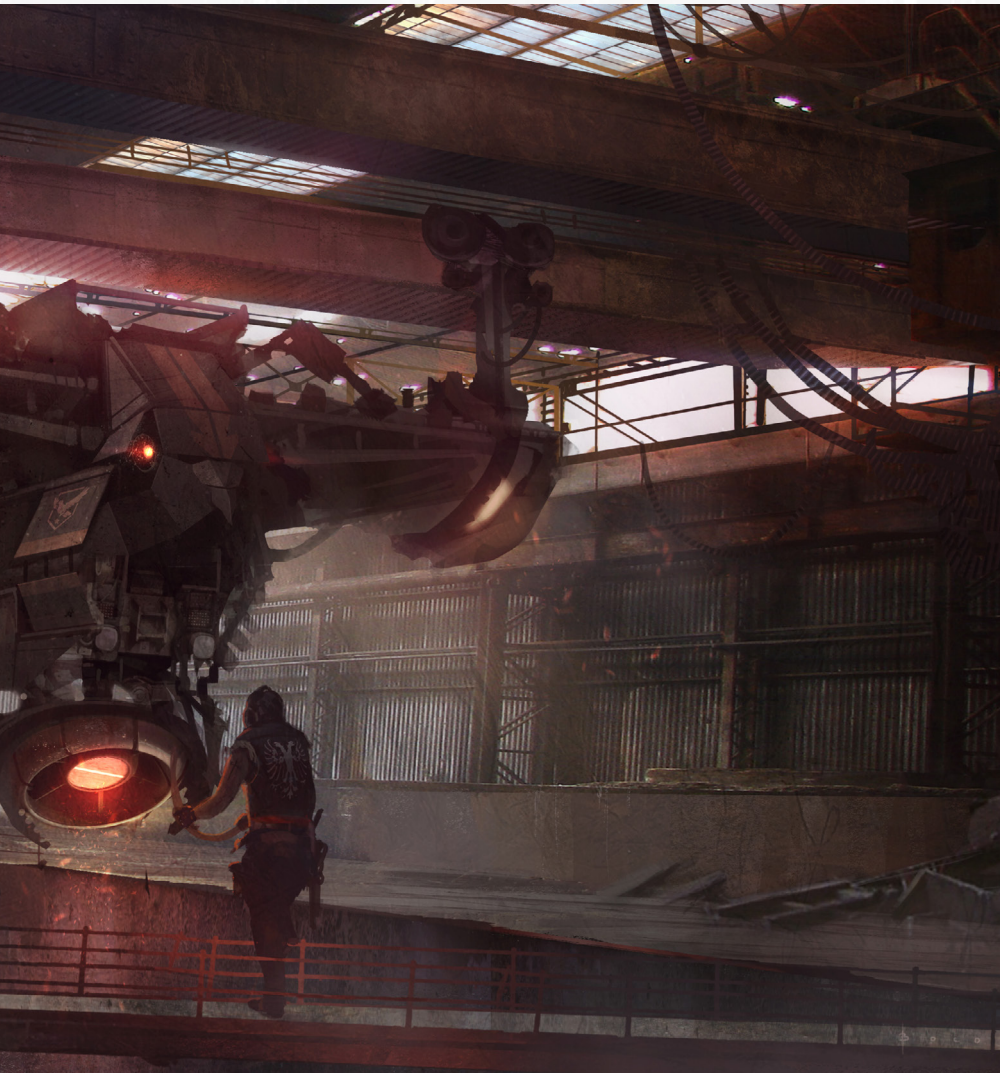


● Boco's *Pigeon Bombers* piece, an industrial set design for a fictional world © Bram 'Boco' Sels



● Another speedpainting, Boco admits that it's fun to do and great practice as well © Bram 'Boco' Sels





I think *Wolfenstein: The New Order* and *Dishonored* do a great job of that as well. Both games have succeeded in reviving part of history in an entirely new and exciting way, generating interest in their respective time periods as well. I aim to do that in my own work too. I almost always make up a story behind the illustration I'm working on. It helps to be able to drown yourself in the world you're trying to illustrate.

**2da:** Are there any other areas in the digital art world that you'd like to branch into (and why)?

**BS:** I'd love to get better at a 3D sculpting package like ZBrush. It feels like a lot of knowledge from painting can be transferred and I think it can make me understand what I'm painting a lot better too. There's something about turning a character around and sculpting every nook and cranny of it that lets you understand its underlying anatomy a lot better. You get a better feel of every muscle and the way light works around it when you actually sculpt it out of virtual clay. It's also a great way to get out of your comfort zone and look at things from another perspective. It keeps you from doing the same thing over and over again.

**2da:** If you could give future digital artists one piece of advice on working in the industry, what would that be?

**BS:** Keep at it! There's no point in thinking about how much your last painting sucked, it's much more productive to think about how much your next painting is going to blow everyone away. No artist thinks their work is perfect, and if they do, they're doing something wrong because that would mean they have no room left to improve. So taking that as a given fact, sit back a minute and enjoy the ride. Before you know it you'll have so much good work you'll create a portfolio that's hard to miss. Spread that out over the web and your mailbox will be filled with job opportunities in no time.

**2da:** Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

**BS:** A lot more I hope. I've been doing some super-secret work on projects I would've never dared to dream about working on. Once those projects go public I'll be able to share the work I did for them. The work I've done these last two years has been so diverse that I'm not sure what's in store for me next. I hope to do more work in the game industry, maybe a book cover or two, and I'm also thinking about doing some video tutorials/live streams if I ever find the time. Whatever the case, I'll be stampeding my way through 2015! ●





● *Serves Me Right*, is the image  
that got Boco started © Bram  
'Boco' Sels



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## The Artist



**Donovan Valdes**  
donovanvaldes.com

**Interviewed by:**  
Jess Serjent-Tipping

Donovan has been in the industry for over 13 years, and has contributed to many titles, such as *Assassin's Creed*, *Ghost Recon*, and *Far Cry*. He is currently taking on a new challenge as art director for Hazard Studios, while also mentoring aspiring concept artists through [conceptcritique.com](http://conceptcritique.com).

# Inspirational game art

With a career that spans over 13 years in the games industry, concept painter and illustrator, Donovan Valdes, talks about his inspirations, techniques and career ▶







Donovan Valdes is a concept painter and illustrator, specializing in visual development and design. He studied fine art and animation at the University of Central Florida where he earned his BA in Motion Picture Technology back in 1997.

Donovan is currently based in Durham, NC, where he is an art director at small game studio, Hazard, where being the sole artist in the group gives him the opportunity to cover everything art-related from concept creation to 3D modeling and texturing. With over 13 years experience under his belt and contributions to such titles as *Assassin's Creed*, *Ghost Recon*, and *Far Cry*, Donovan shares the secrets to his success!

**2dartist:** Could you choose one of your favorite past images (that you've created) and explain a little about its creation, and why it's your favorite?

**Donovan Valdes:** If we're talking about a painting, then I'll pick a recent one with *Wolves and Trees*. It was a side job, mostly for fun, for a heavy metal album my friend was working on. One of their songs was titled 'Wolves and Trees', which instantly brought some crazy images to mind. He mentioned snow and I knew I wanted to do it.

I like it because it was a spontaneous idea, and went outside the traditional 'realistic' genre I was accustomed to at the time. I was very happy with the mood it invoked when it was all done, the idea for that creepy hand came out of nowhere, but it gives the scene a focus and back-story you want to learn more about.

**"I might not have this job if it wasn't for digital medium and tablet pens specifically. I just don't have the patience to wait for real paint to dry!"**

**2da:** Tell us the story behind your artwork in general: What brought you into the digital art world and what software do you use?

**DV:** I might not have this job if it wasn't for digital medium and tablet pens specifically. I just don't have the patience to wait for real paint to dry! When it comes to rapid idea generation, and being able to work through trial-and-error, nothing beats having layers and an 'undo' button.

I approach each piece differently, but usually I'll have a target image floating in my mind that I'm shooting for. Once I have an idea, I just start laying down some shapes until they start working for me. The real key for me is knowing when to keep changing it, and when to stop and move on. I often have to remind myself (and students) that you have to be willing

● A personal piece, where Donovan challenged himself to draw an event centered around a mounted soldier © Donovan Valdes







● *Wolves and Trees* created as a side project for a friend's heavy metal album © Donovan Valdes

to change your own work if you want to improve... which can be quite difficult for any artist. That mental exercise of constantly critiquing and altering as you go is what makes you better.

I've tried a few platforms, but I'm most comfortable with Photoshop.

**2da:** Do you have any tips for using this software or any other software that you happen to use to create your art in general?

**DV:** Like I said above, take advantage of the medium! The ability to add layers and undo gives an artist so much flexibility and speed, there's no excuse for remaining in a shell. I'll probably hit undo a dozen times for every stroke I commit to. I just keep changing it until I feel it's right. Many people still approach it gingerly, forcing their lines, and trying

to get it right the first time. I don't think this takes advantage of the tool at all.

**2da:** Would you consider yourself to have a particular signature style, or techniques that you will often use?

**DV:** Others have said they recognize a style in my work, but I don't know what it is. I do know I've come to rely heavily on masks and the Lasso tool, and I enjoy crisp, sharp edges and shapes. When I discovered how to Preserve Transparency in my layers, it was a bit of a game-changer for me. It allowed me SO much more freedom to try new textures and lighting schemes.

**2da:** What software would you like to learn in the future to expand your portfolio and skillset and why?

**DV:** I tried ZBrush a few years back, and really enjoyed it. Unfortunately, my work hasn't called for its use since then, but I know I can make some cool stuff if I immersed myself in it for a while. Again, it's a patience thing. I've tried clay and sculpt before, but I can't work quickly enough in the traditional mediums. ZBrush allows me to do what I want almost immediately.

**2da:** How do you keep your portfolio up-to-date? Any tips?

**DV:** I find it's tough to routinely update a public portfolio while working full-time on unreleased projects – you end up having to devote free time just to make stuff you can show people! However, I would suggest not trying to make everything a portfolio piece. Instead, keep a sketchbook with you everywhere, and keep up your life drawing ►





● Donovan created this assigned mood piece depicting a climactic scene for *Assassin's Creed* © Ubisoft













● A remote base, built from scavenged material, and home to a cultish anti-government group in the Tom Clancy universe © Ubisoft



- A demon design for a fantasy game pitch that was never approved  
© Ubisoft

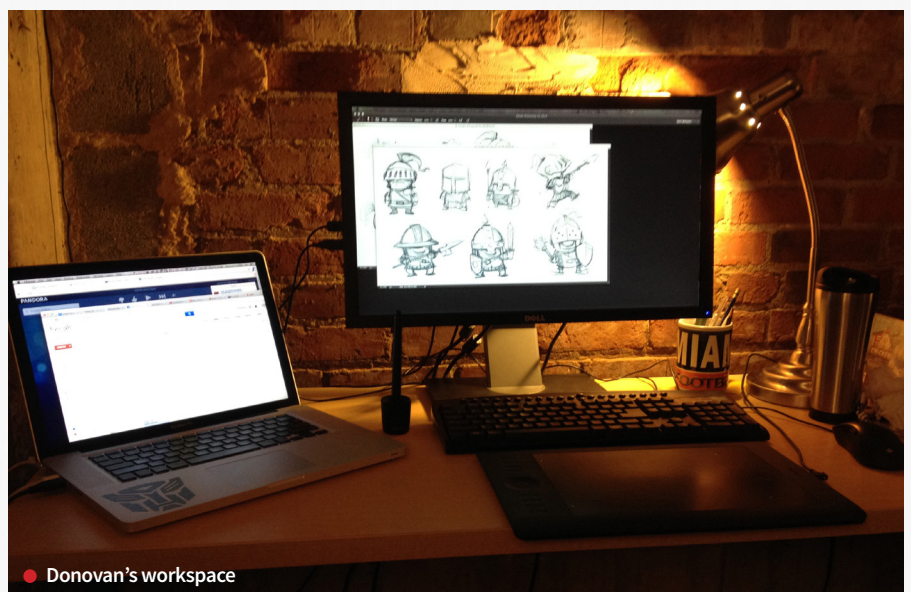


and gesturing skill. I find these 'working' sketches make for great portfolio entries, even if they weren't created with that intent. I know when I'm interviewing art candidates, whether at Red Storm or through my concept critique services, I pay as much attention to process and rough sketches as I do finished pieces.

**2da:** Who are your favorite artists, traditional or digital, and can you explain why?

**DV:** I've always enjoyed Craig Mullins and Jaime Jones. Their loose-but-tight renderings have always pushed me. I also really love Glen Keane's traditional animations. ... especially his rough pencil-tests. An entire generation grew up watching his characters.

**2da:** How do you spend your free time away from the demands and deadlines of the creative industry?



● Donovan's workspace



**DV:** I love spending time with my family...simple stuff like board games or going to the park. I also love playing PC games, watching sports, and playing guitar. I've always said, if I didn't have to pay the bills, I might be playing music every day.

**2da:** What has been your favorite project to work on/greatest artistic achievement?

**DV:** That's a tough question. I enjoy the stylistic freedom of my current projects. If I had to pick one though, it might be for a game that never got the green light. It was all about a surviving in an apocalyptic demon-invaded world, and I got to go crazy for about 10 months making a lot of art to try and sell it. Lots of fun brainstorming for that one.

**2da:** If you could give future digital artists one piece of advice on working in the industry, what would the advice be?

**DV:** I would say to keep learning, and never stay static. With the abundance of resources available online these days, artists are becoming more versatile at an early age, and the bar has been set quite high. However, there is no replacement for passion and practice.

Many of my students grow impatient with themselves and expect instant awesomeness because they've purchased some high end tools, never having built a solid foundation around the fundamentals, i.e. composition, perspective, lighting, anatomy, and so on. Those skills are timeless. You have to keep practicing, all the time.

**2da:** Finally, what can we expect to see from you in the future?

**DV:** Staying up to date with my online portfolio is not a strength of mine, I'm afraid, but hopefully you'll see some fun games, and a few nice sketches up on my site soon.

I'm also working on a few paintings with an old friend, for an exciting new game recently featured at E3. I'll post those as soon as I'm able. ●





● A home base for some rogue terrorist cell, set in the Tom Clancy universe © Ubisoft







## 🕒 Artist Timeline Donovan's career up to this point

**1997:** Graduated from University of Central Florida's Film School with a degree in Film & Animation. Donovan took lots of art, animation, and film classes, which helped set the foundation for him. Working in film crews helped him learn to work with a team to achieve a common goal.

**1997:** Applied to Disney's Feature Animation's Internship. He explains that he almost made the last cut. Having his sights set on Disney Feature for a long time, this was a big event that pushed him towards other arenas, including games.

**1998:** Donovan started his first 'real' art job at a small studio in Orlando, FL, making web animations, illustrations, and logos. He gained his first real experience in Photoshop, Illustrator, After Effects, and a couple of 3D platforms.

**2002:** Donovan's first game industry job at Vicious Cycle Software, then in Chapel Hill, NC, where he learned a little about everything, and got some great experience in a production studio atmosphere.

**2005:** He was hired as a senior concept artist at Ubisoft/Red Storm Entertainment, where he focused almost exclusively on concept painting and design for many big games. Needless to say, he admits that he learned quite a bit about the craft and working in a large production studio.

**2013:** Eager for a new challenge, Donovan decided to try his hand as an art director for a small studio in Durham, NC. He confesses to wearing many hats, and having fun learning all sorts of new stuff.





● This upscale rooftop bar and cafe serves as a key landmark in this multiplayer map © Ubisoft









## THE DIGITAL PAINTING RESOURCE

LayerPaint allows you to browse the gallery, interviews, news, tutorials and products all dedicated to 2D digital art. On top of that, we have included a free custom brushes library that is available to everyone.

We wish LayerPaint to be a definitive resource for digital painting, creating a friendly and educational environment that not only helps budding and experienced CG artists alike, but also showcases some of the best computer generated artwork in the world.

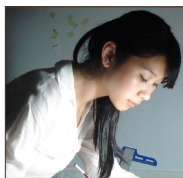


TRAN NGUYEN

Sketchbook

Tran Nguyen opens the pages to her sketchbook filled with surreal and fantasy images inspired by nature and odd dreams

## The Artist



**Tran Nguyen**

[mynameistran.com](http://mynameistran.com)

Tran Nguyen is a Georgia-based gallery artist and freelance illustrator. She has worked for clients such as Playboy, Tor, McDonald's, Chateau St. Michelle Winery, and has showcased with galleries in California, New York, Spain, and Italy. She is currently represented by Richard Solomon and Thinkspace gallery.



### Escape into the surrealist pages of Tran's sketchbook...

Sketching preliminaries help me explore possible concepts, compositions, value studies, and placement of details. It's the foundation of a final illustration. When conceptualizing for a client, I want to make sure that the main idea is conveyed in the best possible way. In order to yield this, it takes

several composition thumbnails and rough ideation comps to find the perfect solution to the client's need.

When I'm not creating for a client, sketching is a superb way to keep my hand flexible and exercise muscle memory – it's extremely important to maintain your anatomy skills. Attending figure drawing classes is a must, or if it's not accessible, there are plenty of

resources available online. I enjoy creating rough, gestural ones, as opposed to tight figure studies.

Since my paintings are quite refined, it's therapeutic to sketch in a more relaxed manner. I think it's crucial to keep your free-sketching loose so that you can liberate yourself from the restraints and rigidity of having to detail every asset of an image. ►

01

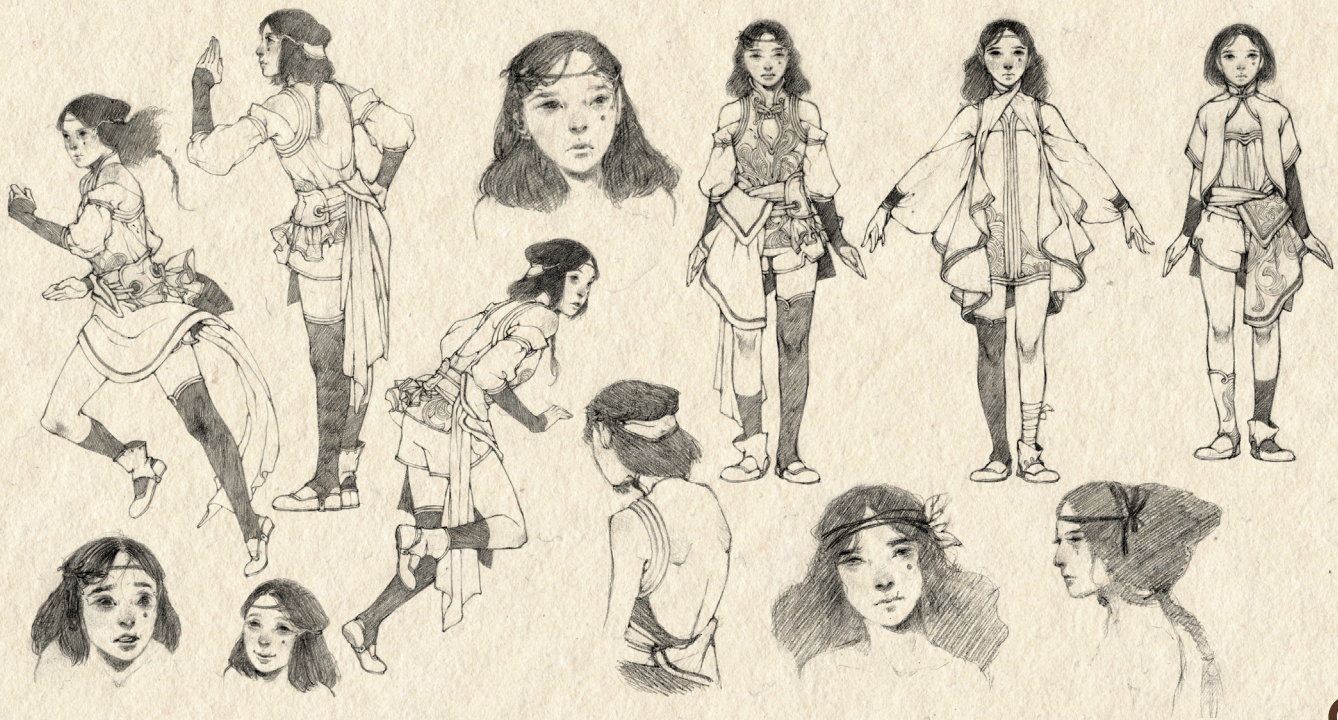
#### Dream

I came across a debonair fox and his fanciful monocle. He took me by the hand and said, "Come, come, help my friend whose bulbous head is stuck in a tree-hole. Ducking, turning, twisting, churning, we came upon the peculiar girl and her peculiar situation. "Save me!" she exclaimed. Feeble and helpless, I refrained from answering. Then, I noticed yet another odd, beak-nosed boy. He quacked and tracked and urged me to help his friend. "But I am just a frail mind," I told the boy. Then suddenly, the boy and the fox turned their unusual bodies toward me and their eyes began to pierce my soul... I stood still, trying to hold on to a relapsed sanity...

01







02



03

02 This is a character sheet of an original design

03 The three thumbnails and rough final sketch were done for a short story over at [www.tor.com](http://www.tor.com). The story focuses on two sisters and how their lives parallel that of insects



### Inspiration and ideas

Most of my inspirations are from the people I know and meet, and their stories. I'm fond of interpreting their situations and visually representing it through abstract shapes, billowing fabric, and recurring motifs. My surrealism and fantasy influences come from nature and the odd dreams I have from time to time.

### Materials

My preliminaries are usually done on a small, intimate scale and the best surface for this is smooth Bristol paper. I generally prefer graphite when it comes to sketching, from grade 8H to 9B, Tuff Stuff eraser sticks, and Prismacolor's Magic Rub. For value studies, I'll sometimes import the graphite sketch into Photoshop to add a deeper level of lights and darks. Using a Wacom Intuos 3 tablet and the soft round brush, I can create a more refined study for clients before continuing on to the final illustration.

### Sketching techniques

A few techniques that I use include hatching, crosshatching, blending, and linear mark-making. Hatching and crosshatching is a great way to create value with texture, especially for detailing fabric. Blending or smearing the graphite allows for a smooth gradient in rendering skin or round objects. With linear mark-making, I can create a bolder gradient with a particular texture. For example, if I render with a circular motion, the gradation will appear smoother with a light circular texture. It's the same if I use an oval or rectangular shape. ●



**04** Live for the sake of your soul... because doing otherwise would be irreverent. And if we don't, it will slowly but surely dissipate from our body, leaving a vacant shell bare of existential aesthetics. If you've no family or friends worth living for, then *live for the sake of your soul*

**05** *Nostalgia*: This is another sketch that illustrates my deep interest in nostalgia and distant memories - this one wanders off into nature as opposed to suburban surroundings

**06** *Our Fluttersome Ordeal* features a winged creature theme











**07** *Wandering Across a Borrowed Belief:*  
One of the preliminaries for a two-  
person show I did at Thinkspace Gallery  
in Culver City. The series emphasizes  
mental rapture and turmoil

**08** This is a figure study montage

**07**





08

## ⚡ PRO TIPS

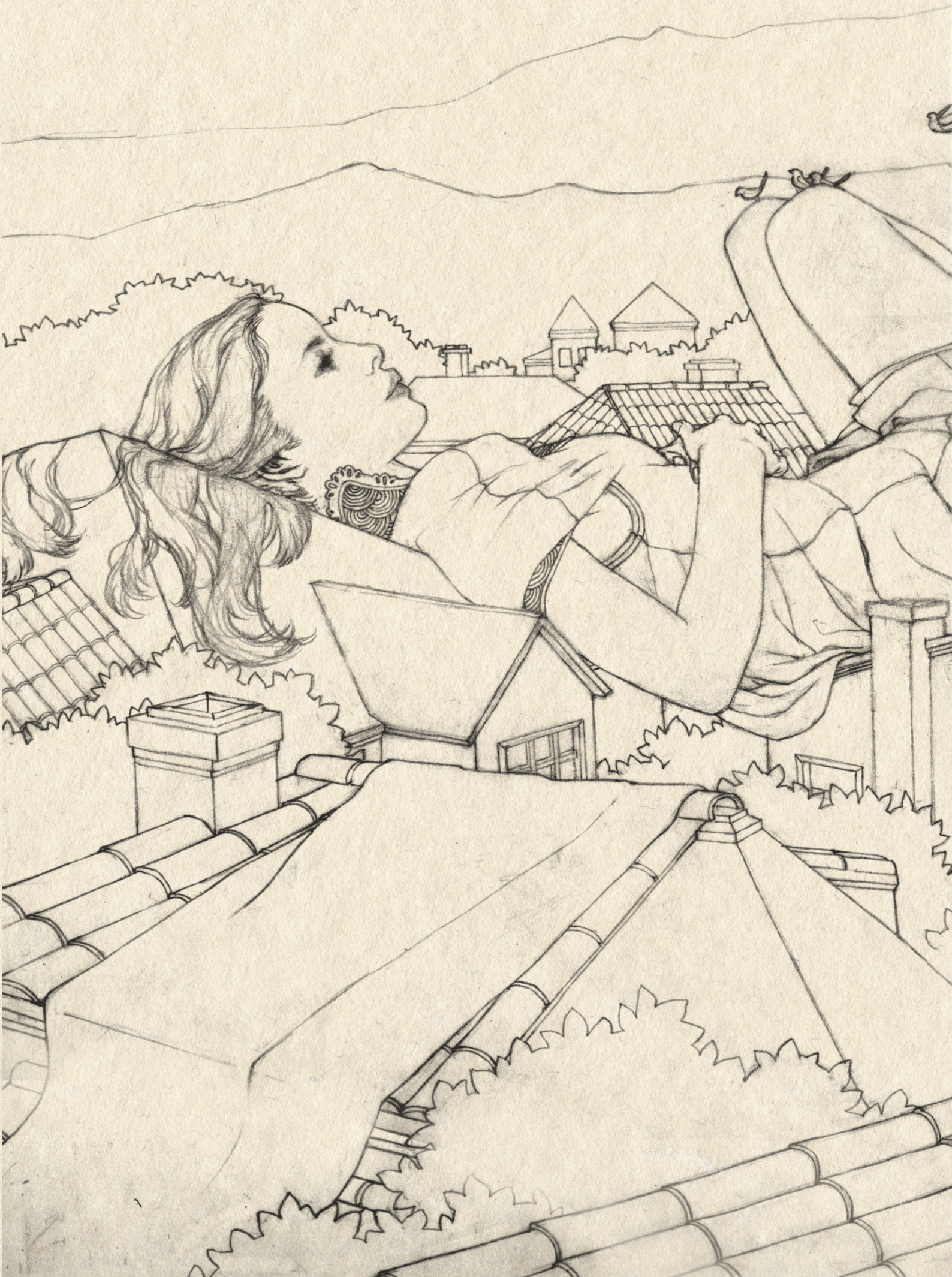
### Keep it loose

When you sketch, make sure you keep your lines and shapes loose. I like to start with scribbly lines to create random shapes. After a while, certain forms will appear. Also try to keep your pencil tip on the paper – not picking it up while you scribble will allow for more dynamic shapes. The purpose of sketching isn't to create a perfectly rendered image – it's used to help you problem-solve whatever it is that the client has presented to you.

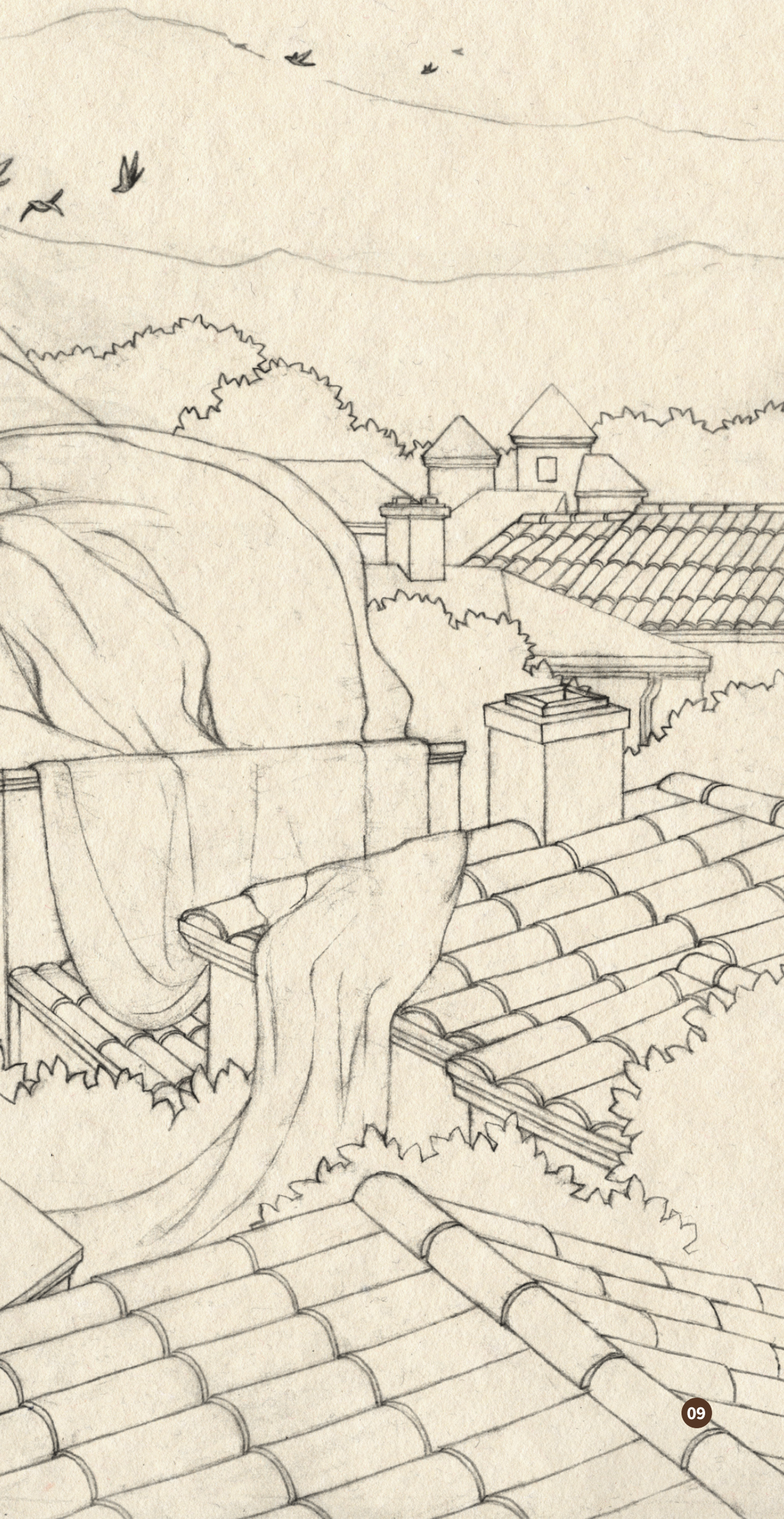
### Make use of your wrist

Execute your sketches with the entire scope of your wrist, not just your fingers. Your carpal bones offer almost 360-degrees of motion range. Make use of it. In doing so, your curves will be smoother and your lines will be straighter. It's a great way to avoid rigid figure work, and create more compelling character compositions.









09 *Treading Through An Untrimmed Memory:* This is one of my favorite sketches that I did for a series that explores the wonder of nostalgia and distant memories



# 2dartist

## Would you like to see your sketches featured in 2dartist magazine?

We're always on the lookout for talented artists  
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images or a link to your portfolio online, plus a  
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Download the free trial at [www.lightwave3d.com](http://www.lightwave3d.com)



Italian digital artist Lorenzo Zitta knows how to create thought provoking still images with LightWave 11.6. Whether the still is computer-generated with LightWave, an artful arrangement of digital photos, or a combination of the two, the composition of the scene – with its attention to detail and unusual merging of objects – demands a closer look.

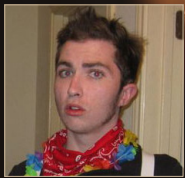
"Thanks to LightWave, I can quickly test many different approaches for my projects. I love bringing models into Layout and switching on Radiosity, then start working on shading and lighting, bringing in more elements, and testing and improvising to get the look I want." - Lorenzo Zitta.

 **LightWave® 11.6**  
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# Art Gallery

Each issue the 2dartist team selects 10 of the best digital images from around the world. Enjoy!



## Gate 3

Ryan Gitter

Year created: 2014

Software used: Photoshop

Web: [gitterart.com](http://gitterart.com)

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Submit your images! Simply email [jess@3dtotal.com](mailto:jess@3dtotal.com)





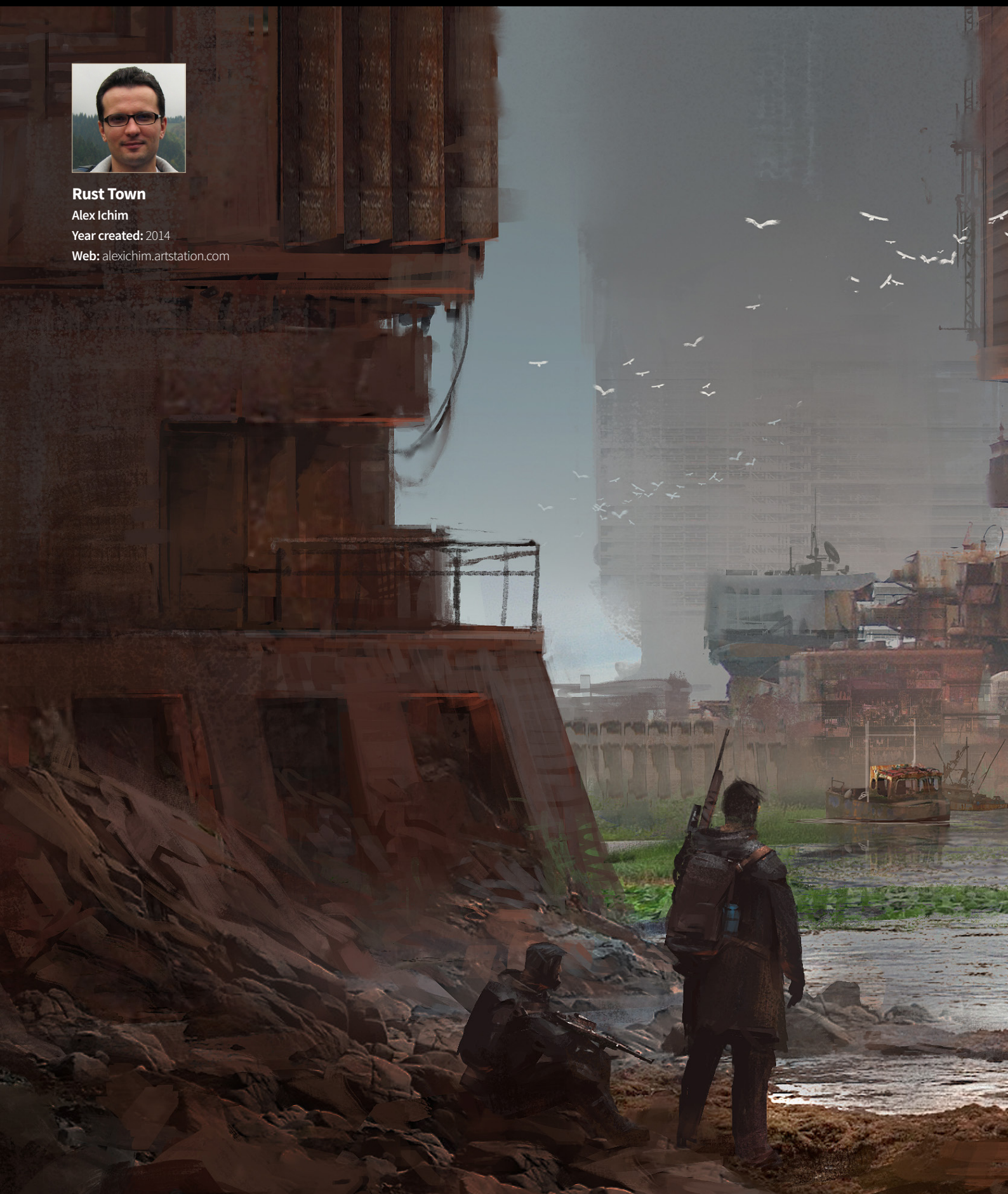


## Rust Town

Alex Ichim

Year created: 2014

Web: [alexichim.artstation.com](http://alexichim.artstation.com)







Jchill  
2016





**Order An Attack**

Park Jong Won (J.C Park)

Year created: 2013

Web: [j-circle.net](http://j-circle.net)





## Nymphs

Victor Maury

Year created: 2013

Web: [victormaury.com](http://victormaury.com)

© Victor Maury 2014





## Riots

Darek Zabrocki

Year created: 2014

Web: [darekzabrocki.com](http://darekzabrocki.com)









## Factory

Ioan Dumitrescu

Year created: 2014

Web: [ioandumitrescu.com](http://ioandumitrescu.com)











## Two Sides of a Battle: A Tragedy Told by Hands

Lucas Parolin de Souza

Year created: 2014

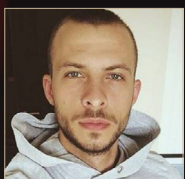
Web: [lucasparolin.com](http://lucasparolin.com)











**Lucky Strike**

Pozdnyakov Ivan

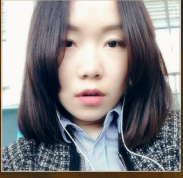
Year created: 2014

Web: [a-p-e-o-n-e.blogspot.ru](http://a-p-e-o-n-e.blogspot.ru)









## Phantom

Mingzhu Yang

Year created: 2013

Web: [artstation.com/artist/ming](http://artstation.com/artist/ming)

© Applibot, Inc







### Humanoid Mecha

Bruno Gauthier Leblanc

Year created: 2014

Web: [inkertone.blogspot.ca](http://inkertone.blogspot.ca)



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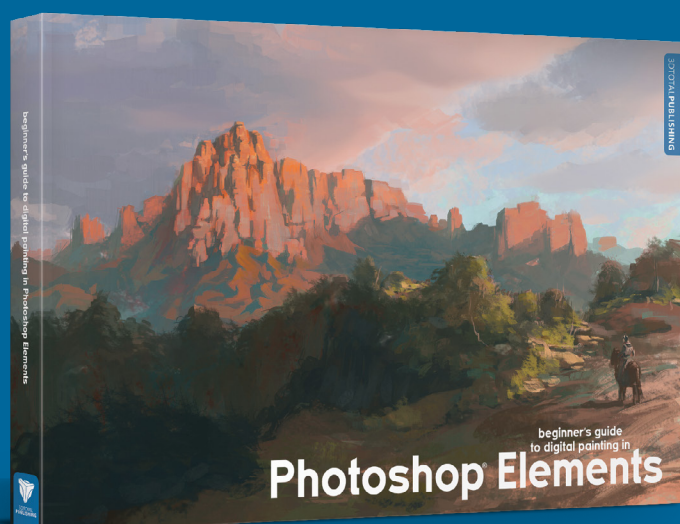


3DTOTALPUBLISHING



# beginner's guide to digital painting in Photoshop® Elements

The *Beginner's Guide* series is back with a clear and comprehensive look at working in Adobe Photoshop Elements.



In this sequel to the best-selling *Beginner's Guide to Digital Painting in Photoshop* book, a new set of talented artists break down the best and simplest techniques for creating amazing artwork in Photoshop Elements. This fundamental guide offers easy-to-follow steps that guide you through setting up your software, working with brushes and basic art theory, as well as chapters on creating certain artistic styles.

With a simplified interface and fewer variable parameters to learn than its big brother, Photoshop, Photoshop Elements is an ideal tool for any artist's first digital adventure. This book is therefore a perfect resource for:

- Newcomers to Photoshop and digital painting
- Artists looking to switch from a traditional medium
- Lecturers and students teaching/studying digital art courses
- Hobbyists who want to learn useful tips

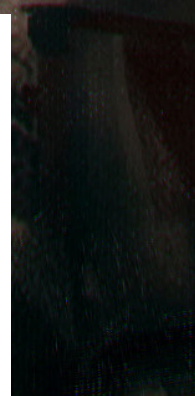
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# Learn texture skills

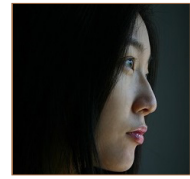
As part of a series that takes a look at both the fundamentals of creating visual art and the technical parts of digital painting, Donglu Yu provides detailed, step-by-step tutorials that cover the techniques needed to create a complex action scene of your own. In this final installment, Donglu demonstrates techniques to render details and final touches in your scene, including top tips for adding traditional textures using ArtRage [▶](#)







## The Artist



**Donglu Yu**

[donglu-littlefish.blogspot.ca](http://donglu-littlefish.blogspot.ca)

**Software Used:**

Photoshop, ArtRage

Donglu Yu is a senior concept artist working at Ubisoft Montreal. She has worked on game titles such as *Assassin's Creed Brotherhood*, *Assassin's Creed III*, *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* and *Deus Ex: Human Revolution*.



## Discover how to add traditional brushstroke textures to your scene...

The closer we get to the end of the creation of an image, the more it becomes time-consuming to render the finer details and to give some crisp final touches to the illustration. We might get the impression of being less efficient, however such slowing down is quite normal, and necessary to close the painting process. We are not far from our final goal, so let's move on!

**01 More refinement:** First, there is some work to do on the left side of the ruins. These ruins are still painted very roughly with some rock textures, however I want them to be a continuous part of the right side ruins so I add some stone bricks that appear to have been crafted by men long ago.

**02 Vegetation:** Having added detail to the ruins, I also have to add some moss, vegetation and sandy grounds on top of the ruins, so it integrates well with the right side of the hill where the central temple is located.

**03 Silhouette refinement:** One thing that gives any painting a more finished quality is well worked outlines or silhouettes of the different elements. Usually, the closer the elements are to the viewers, the more they need crispness or attention to the silhouettes to create atmospheric perspective.

In our case, the foreground tree branches and the hunters fall into this category. The vegetation on the hill also needs some work: even though they are far away, they are against a very clean sky background which makes them easily



01

noticeable to the viewers. I have circled all those components in red to make them obvious.

**04 Overall adjustments:** At this stage, it would be extremely helpful to zoom out of the image in order to see if it conveys the ambience that you have originally imagined. For me, I find the color tone a bit cold, in particular

the fog between the hunters and the ruins has a blue tone that dominates the painting more than what I had in mind. To quickly correct the color tone, I make a Color Balance adjustment layer and shift the mid-tone values more towards yellow and red.



02





03



04



05

**05 Shifting values:** I have also noticed that the values of the hunters are a little bit too bright since my intention was to have them in the shadow. So I select the characters with my previous preserved masks and use the Levels adjustment layer to modify the values. ►

**01** Adding some more detail to the left side of the ruins

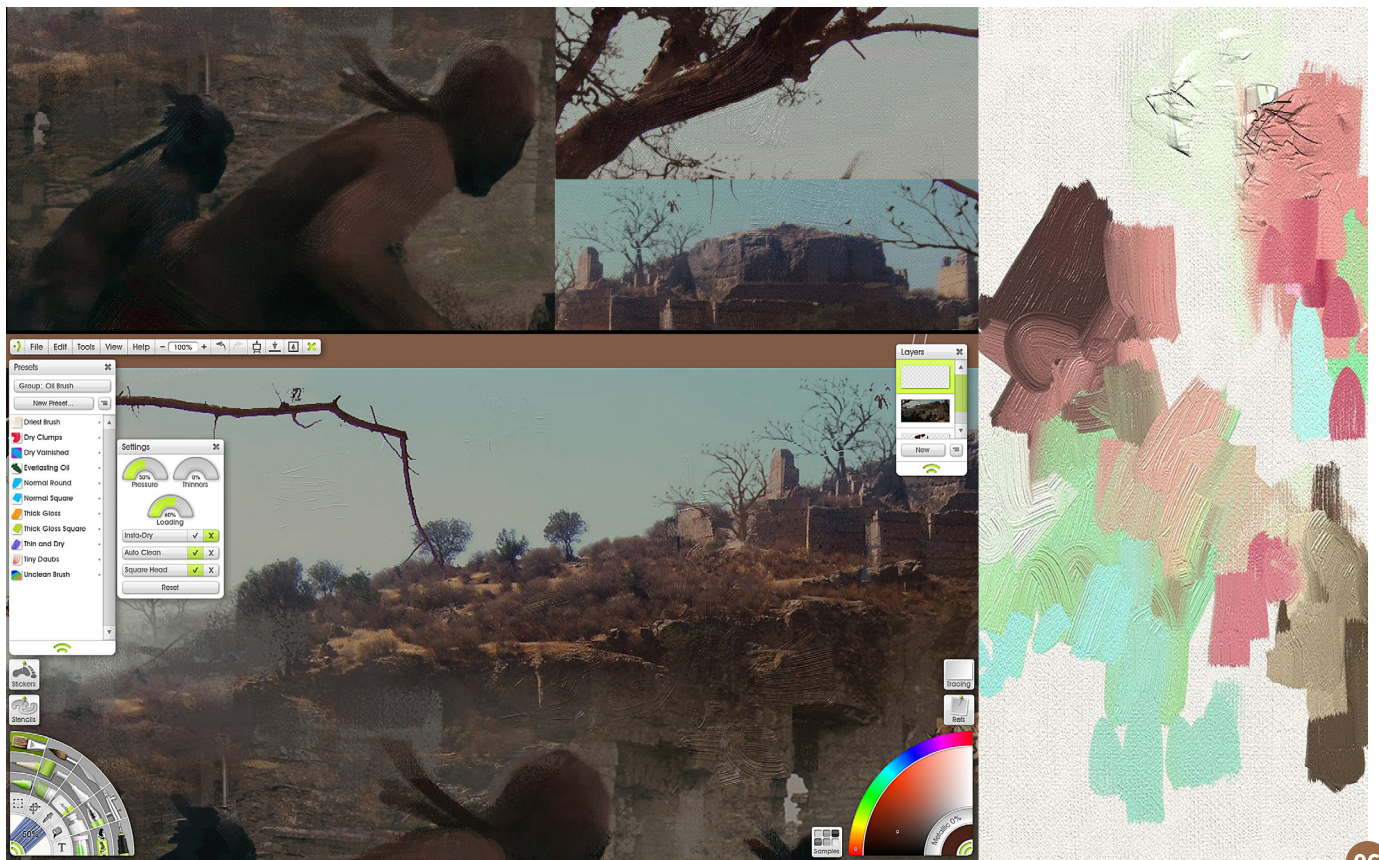
**02** Applying vegetation to the tops of the ruins to composite the building into the scene

**03** Picking out areas in the image to refine to create atmospheric depth

**04** Color and mood adjustments on the fog around the hunters and ruins

**05** Tweaking the values of the hunters to suit the scene





06

**“I always bring my Photoshop image into ArtRage to give it a brushstrokes effect, then export it back Photoshop”**

**06 ArtRage texture:** Since I started traditional painting before using Photoshop, I always love the traditional oil brushstrokes on the canvas. I try to mimic this traditional aspect of the oil painting whenever I can. ArtRage is a very handy software that serves this purpose.

Compared to Painter, ArtRage is much more compact and easier to load. It aims to mimic all kinds of traditional media such as oil, palette knife, pastel, roller, pencil, pen, and so on.

I always bring my Photoshop image into ArtRage to give it a brushstrokes effect, then export it back Photoshop. (See the pro tip on ArtRage for a full introduction of this software).

I make a quick sample on the right side of the image here. There are still a lot of effects to be discovered in ArtRage, and you can try it out to give a traditional painting feel to your Photoshop image, or create entirely a new painting in ArtRage from scratch.

**07 Final highlights:** If well-worked outlines or silhouettes give paintings a

## PRO TIP

### A brief introduction to ArtRage

There are four important windows on the interface: Tool Picker, Presets, Settings and Layers. I try to stick with those basic tools without getting too fancy with the software.

In the left-bottom corner, you can select any of the traditional media that you want to use. Once the tool is selected, oil brush for instance, its related presets will appear automatically in the Presets window. They cover a wide range of variations of oil brushes, such as dry brush, day clumps, dry varnished, normal square, thick gloss, and so on.

What is cool about this software is that you can select one preset as your basic setting, and further tweak it in the Settings window by adjusting its pressure, thinners, loading, and so on. After few adjustments, you can really get a brush which is very close to what you have used traditionally.

The last window Layers is very similar to what we have in Photoshop, but more simplified. It stays very useful for organizing your painting layers. One of the cool characteristics of ArtRage is that the colors can be blended very naturally together, and create subtle color nuances in the mixing.

more finishing quality, then adding some crisp highlights to selected elements is another trick to reach a higher level of rendering.

Those highlights make the elements stand out to catch the viewer's attention. I don't want to make them too obvious and bold on this image, so I just apply them very loosely to suggest that they are

there; this is because I don't want to break the oil painting quality that has been achieved in this image has for now.

You can notice that I mainly add highlights on the hunters' hair, the right-side ruins and the tree branches, this is because our light source is from the left hand side of the canvas.



**08 Birds:** For any outdoor environment, it is always nice to add some birds. They are very useful for enhancing the sense of scale to the setting.

**09 Subtle color aberration:** Color aberration is a type of distortion where there is a failure of a lens to focus all colors to the same convergence point. Under Filter > Distort > Lens Correction, you have the option to add or to remove color aberration. I add some subtle aberration so the image has some kind of photographic quality.

**10 Final level adjustments:** We are really close to the finished painting! I want to make a final contrast adjustment to boost up the central part of the canvas in order to make the point of interest even more evident.

**11 Final image:** Now it is time to put your signature, and you can see the final



07



08



09



10

**06** Adding texture detail with ArtRage

**07** Some highlights added to the scene to complement the position of the light source

**08** Placing birds in the scene to create a sense of scale

**09** Applying some color aberration to the scene to give a photo-effect

**10** Boosting the contrast adjustment to focus the point of interest



## The Artist



**Donglu Yu**  
donglu-littlefish.blogspot.ca









# 2d artist

Issue 105 | September 2014

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105

Create the  
cover!  
Step-by-step  
guide inside!

## Craft a career in concept art

Bram 'Boco' Sels reveals  
the secrets of his  
continuous progression

## Learn texture skills

Add traditional brushstroke  
textures to your scene with ArtRage  
– Donglu Yu shows you how



### MASTER THE 2.5D EFFECT

Discover techniques from  
Christopher Peters to liven up  
your portfolio pieces

## +plus

- 10 of the best digital images
- Sketch surreal concepts
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# Create stylized characters

Renée Chio reveals the techniques behind her image *Ballerina*



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After Effects  
project file  
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Photoshop



After Effects

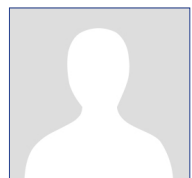
# Master the 2.5D effect

Christopher Peters reveals simple and effective 2.5D techniques, to easily create a parallax effect to bring your illustrations to life ▶





## The Artist



**Christopher Peters**

[trejoeeee.deviantart.com](https://trejoeeee.deviantart.com)

### **Software Used:**

Photoshop

Christopher Peters is a young artist who has dedicated his life to music, history, and digital art among other things. He notes that his art defines him as controlled chaos, and he considers himself to be an eternal student.



## Learn how to add movement to your illustrations using Photoshop and After Effects...

Have you ever wanted to bring to life some of your still photos or illustrations, but you thought 2.5D techniques were difficult to work with? Well, here is a simple and effective way to make an easy parallax effect! So, let's get started then.

### What is parallax?

Before moving forward into the step-by-step tutorial we need to understand some basic concepts of the Parallax Effect. Basically, the parallax is an effect or a digital trick to turn a 2D still image into a 2.5 image, or even a 3D image. The technique is based on separating each element from the background's still, and putting them into a three-dimensional space to create a spatial effect.

So, I strongly recommend you have a look through this tutorial, because it might help you to present your portfolio in an interesting way!

### PHOTOSHOP

**01 X, Y and Z Axis:** You've surely read about this somewhere before, maybe in a Math book, or in a 3D magazine. These simple letters are very important in the three-dimensional matter and for the parallax technique! So let's learn a bit about the X, Y and Z axes.

For some people the reality has four or five dimensions, for others ten dimensions. But for us, only three: width, height and depth. X, Y and Z axes represent each dimension:

- X: Width
- Y: Height
- Z: Depth



In After Effects (the software which we'll use to create the parallax) these axes are represented by colored arrows just like in most of the 3D programs (red, green and blue).

### 02 Moving along the X, Y and Z axis:

We're going to use these axes to move the independent elements inside a three-dimensional space. This is how it works. For example, if you want to move some object horizontally you'll use the X axis, represented by a red arrow. In case you'd need to move an element vertically you'll use the Y axis, represented by a green arrow. And finally, the Z axis will help us moving the elements backward or forward respectively. This axis is one of the most important elements in the parallax effect, since it is the one who will generate the depth and space illusion to our parallax!

### 03 Isolating the elements from the background:

This will be the first part of the tutorial. For this first stage we are going to use Photoshop (it doesn't matter the Photoshop version you're using for this purpose, since most of the Photoshop versions have the tools we need to create this first part of the tutorial).

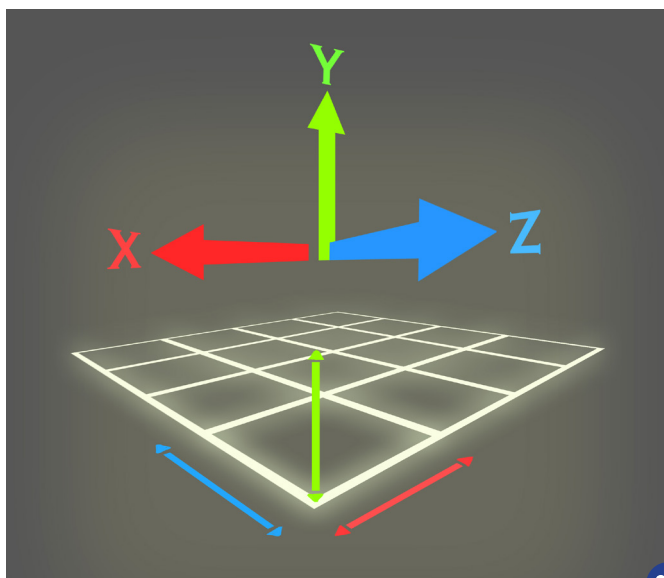
I'm using a standard version of Photoshop CS3 in case you don't have a newer version.

We'll start opening the image that we will use to create the parallax, so go to Menu > File > Open > and choose your still. Then click Open. I choose one of my illustrations from my graphic novel called *Sugar*.

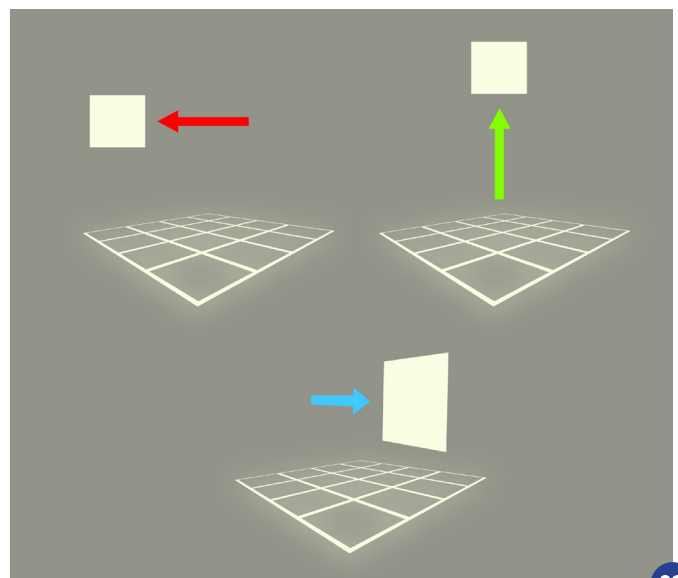
**04 Identifying the dimensions:** Here we can see an interesting scene; three characters, a nice narrative and a lot of space and depth feeling; it's perfect for a parallax!

Our primary job here is to detect the existing dimension in our still. This said, we're going to separate all the elements in the following categories: foreground, middle space and background. (This is a useful way to analyze the dimension of a picture).

**05 The foreground:** Here is where all the elements and closer planes are placed. If we analyze the image, we may conclude that the closer elements to us are the following ones: the character to the right, the other two characters in the middle of the composition and the closer



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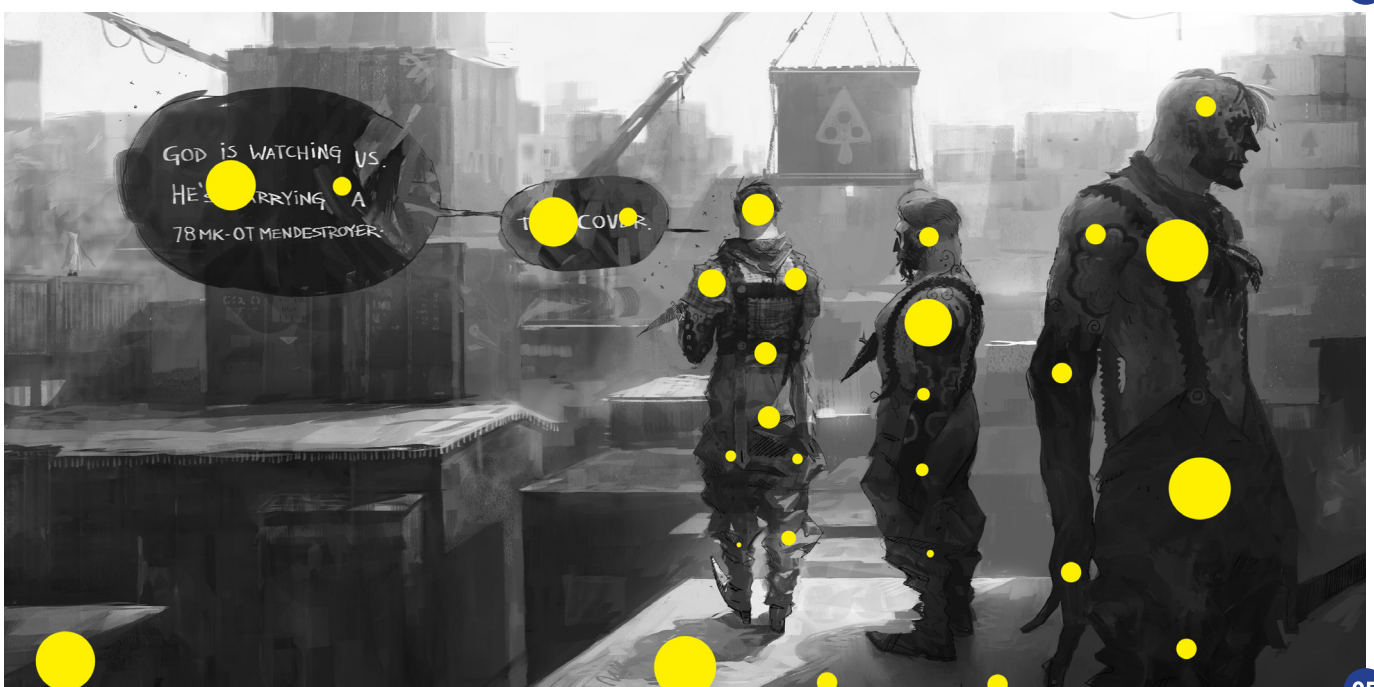
- 01 Each dimension is represented by a letter X, Y or Z
- 02 Imagining boxes moving along an X, Y, or Z axes
- 03 Choosing an illustration as a base for the effect
- 04 Separating out the dimensions
- 05 Marking out the foreground elements



03



04

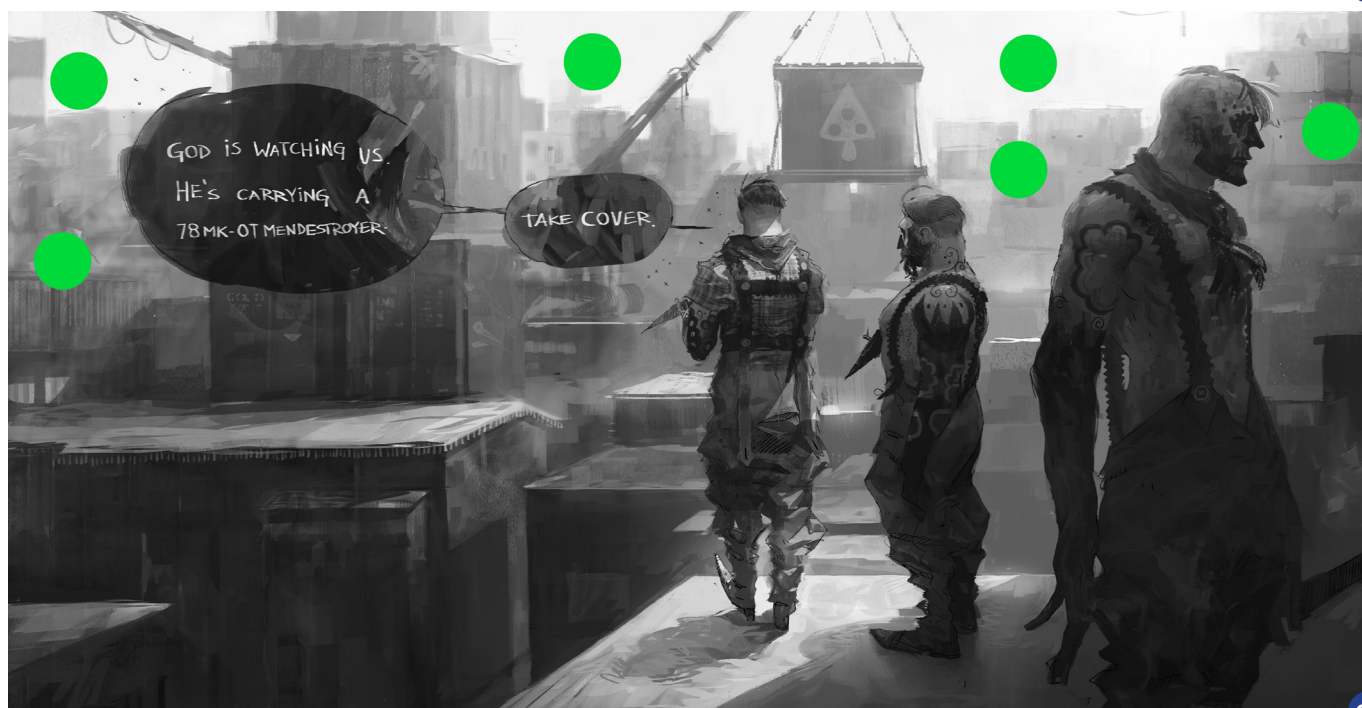


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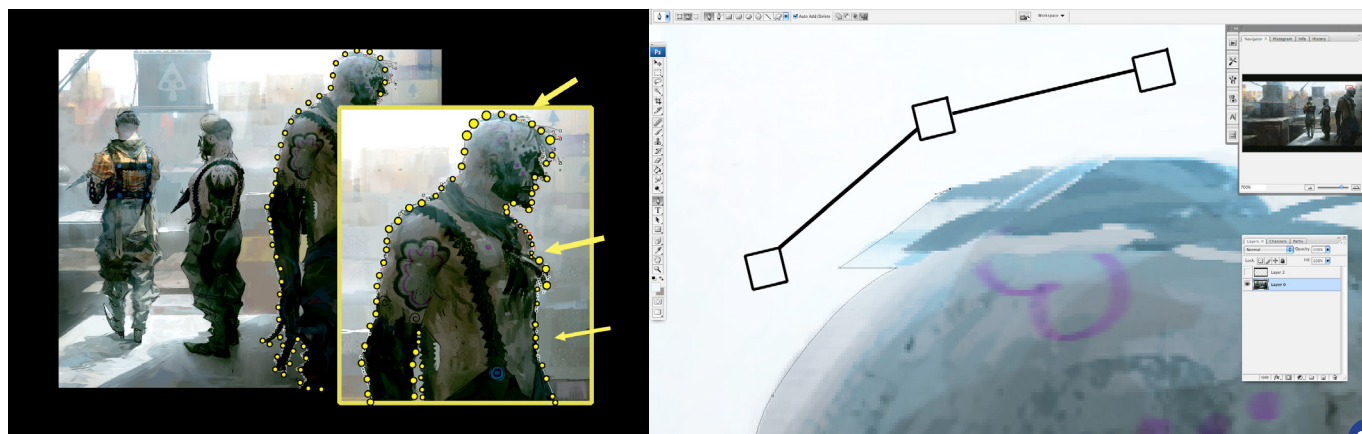




06

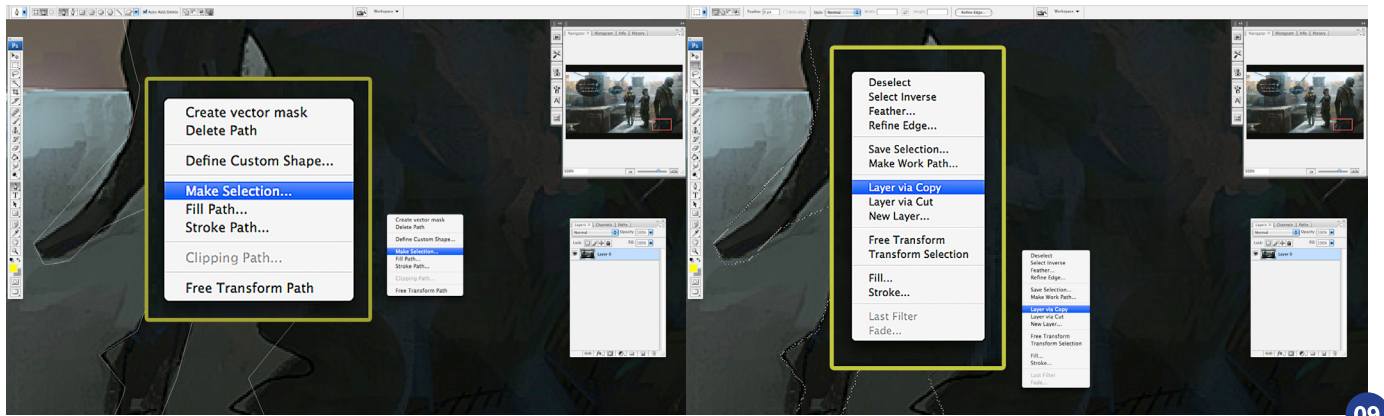


07

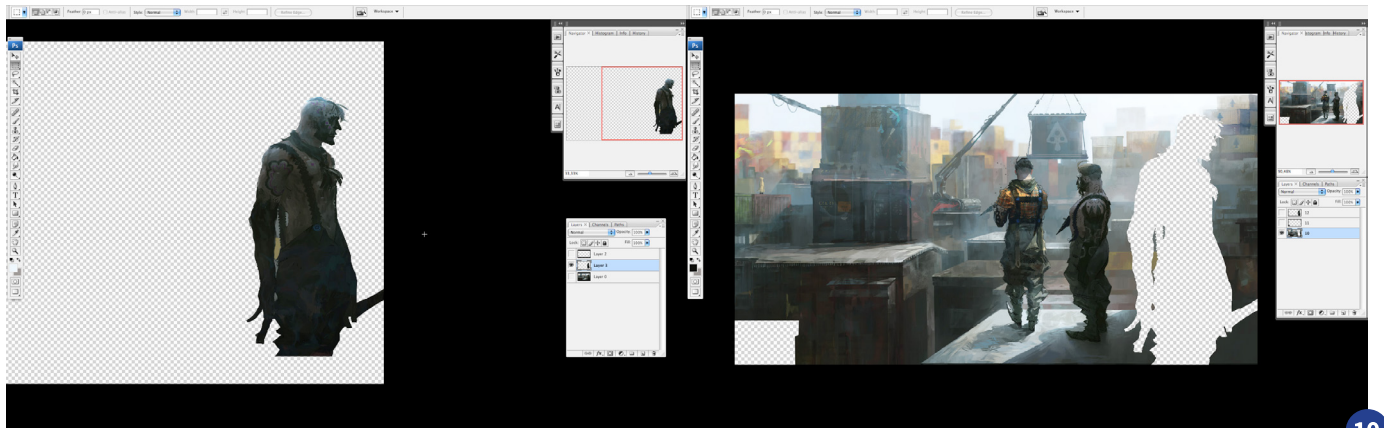


08





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building in the left. I marked all these elements in yellow.

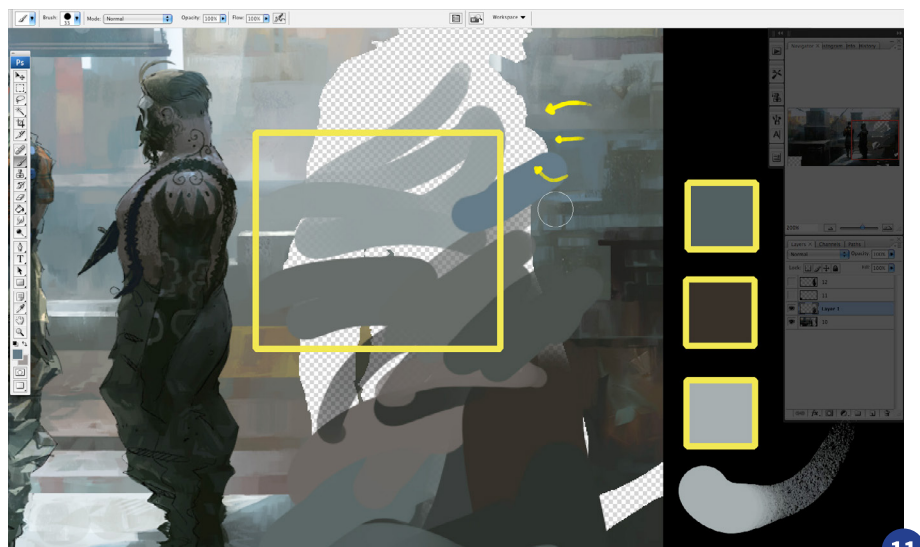
**06 The middle space:** All the objects and elements are placed in a middle distance from us. The elements that are placed in this category are the tower made by containers in the left, the buildings in the middle of the image and the crane with its load. I marked these elements in purple.

**07 The background:** All elements are positioned in the distance. The elements that are placed in this plane are the far containers, and the sky. I marked all these elements in green.

**Note:** The method of separating elements by its location in the 3D space will facilitate its correct distribution in the spatial plane. Keep this in mind for future steps.

**08 Selecting the elements:** We'll start isolating the elements from the foreground. Go to the tools menu in the left of the screen and then select the Pen tool. Start drawing an anchor point path in the element's border.

**09 Separating the elements:** Once you have completed the path, create a new selection and separate the selected area from the background by creating a new independent layer.



11

**10 The result:** When you have separated your selected object from the background, your new layer should look like this image here. Repeat this process with all the elements in the foreground area.

**11 Filling in the background:** Now, we'll fill the void that the layer created in the background! Some people fill this area by using the Clone Stamp tool, or using the Fill filter, but personally I think these tools are imprecise in its function. For this reason, instead of using filters I prefer to fill the empty area by painting the zone with a Photoshop brush. ▶

**06** Marking out the middle ground

**07** Marking out the background elements

**08** Use the Pen tool to isolate the elements

**09** Separating the elements from the background

**10** The result of separating foreground elements from the background

**11** Filling in the background area



This method is simple, I just sample the near colors to the empty area with the Eyedropper tool and then I start painting and completing the void.

**12 The new background:** Repeat this process with all the elements in the foreground area. Once we have done this, we'll see a full new background!

**13 Separating the layers:** Once we have isolated all the elements from the foreground and fill the empty areas with painting, we'll have to separate each element from the



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middle space and the background area. After this we'll paint all these new empty spaces in the image. This method might sound tiring, but it is totally worth it! In the next stage you'll see why.

**14 Ordering the layers:** Your final PSD file would need to be ordered and classified in Foreground Layers, Middle Space Layers and Background Layers.

**Tip:** It's a good idea always to rename each layer with a specific name and a number, this way you'll keep the order according the hierarchy of each element. For example: 'Layer\_01\_Foreground' '03\_background' and so on. We don't want chaos in our layer comp!

**15 Camera movement:** The 'camera' is one of the main aspects of animating a still. The camera shows us what it is happening in the scene, it's like a digital eye which helps us to understand the depth, direction and mood of a shot.

There's a big variety of camera movements, such as Panning (it refers to a simple rotation in a horizontal direction of a camera), Crane Shot, Tracking shot and more.

I choose a simple camera movement to animate my still: moving from upwards to downwards (very similar to the crane shot, but in the opposite direction). I've got to say that it's a basic and simple camera movement – I don't consider myself a genius of moving cameras or of creating exciting cinematic compositions!

**16 Finalizing the PSD files:** It was necessary to increase the overall size of the painting to get a linear camera displacement from a point to another point in the shot with no trouble. This method is not necessary if you choose a camera movement that doesn't require extreme displacement though.

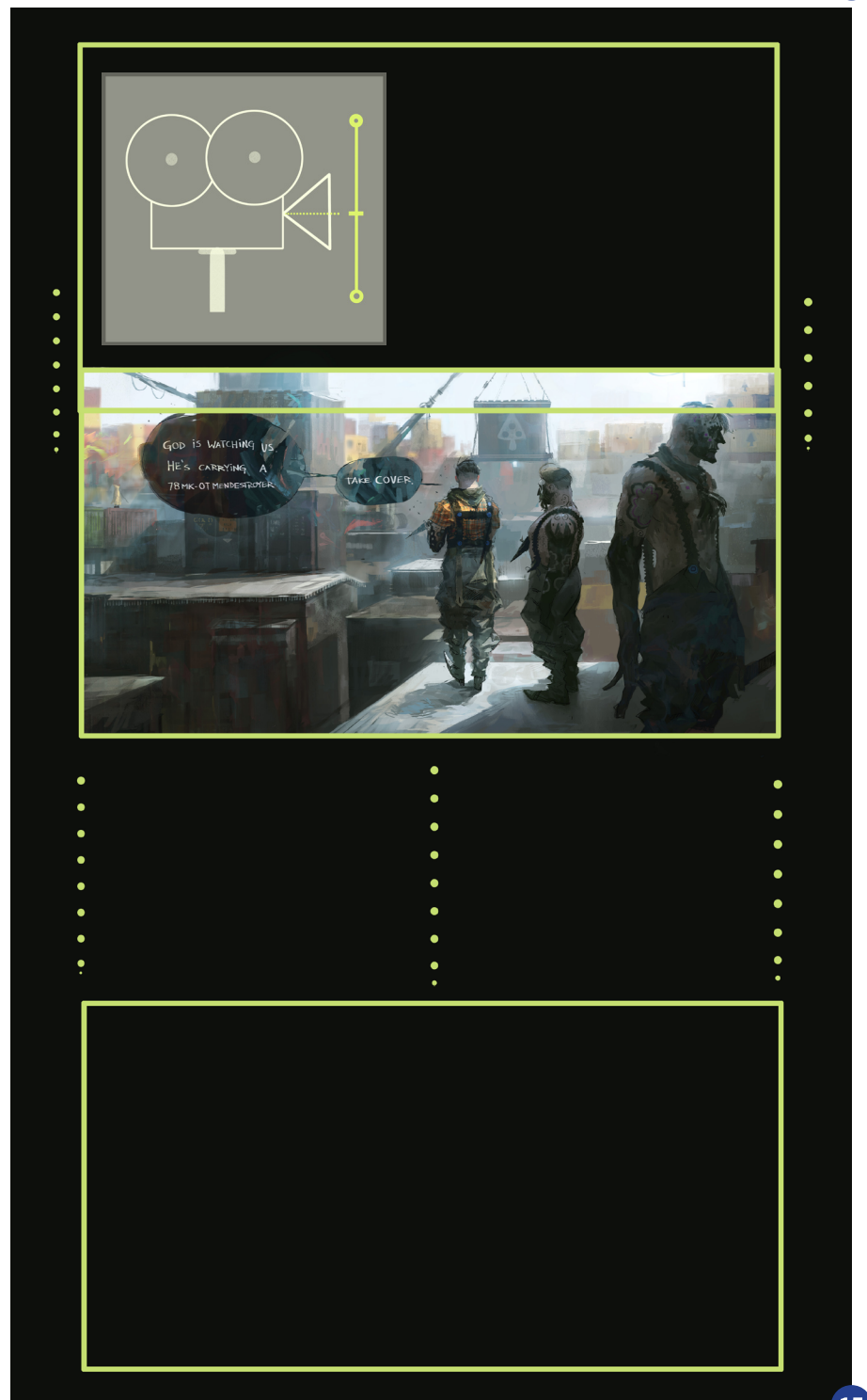
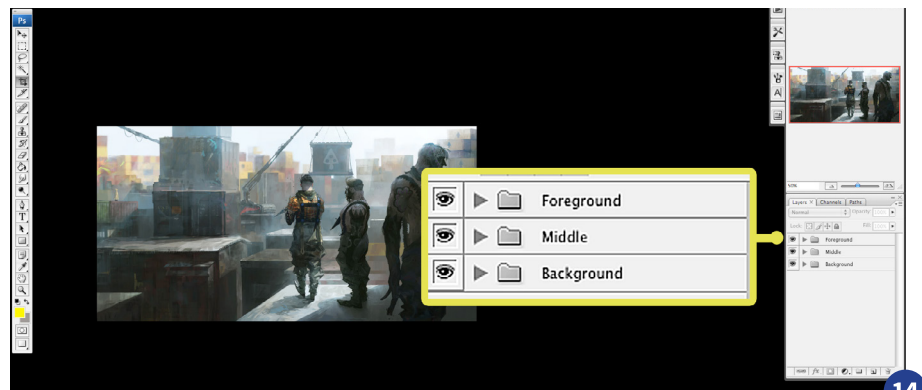
Here is where the first stage ends. Now that we've got our PSD file ready, we can move forward to the next level: After Effects. Here is where the fun really begins! ▶

**12 Continuing to fill in the background**

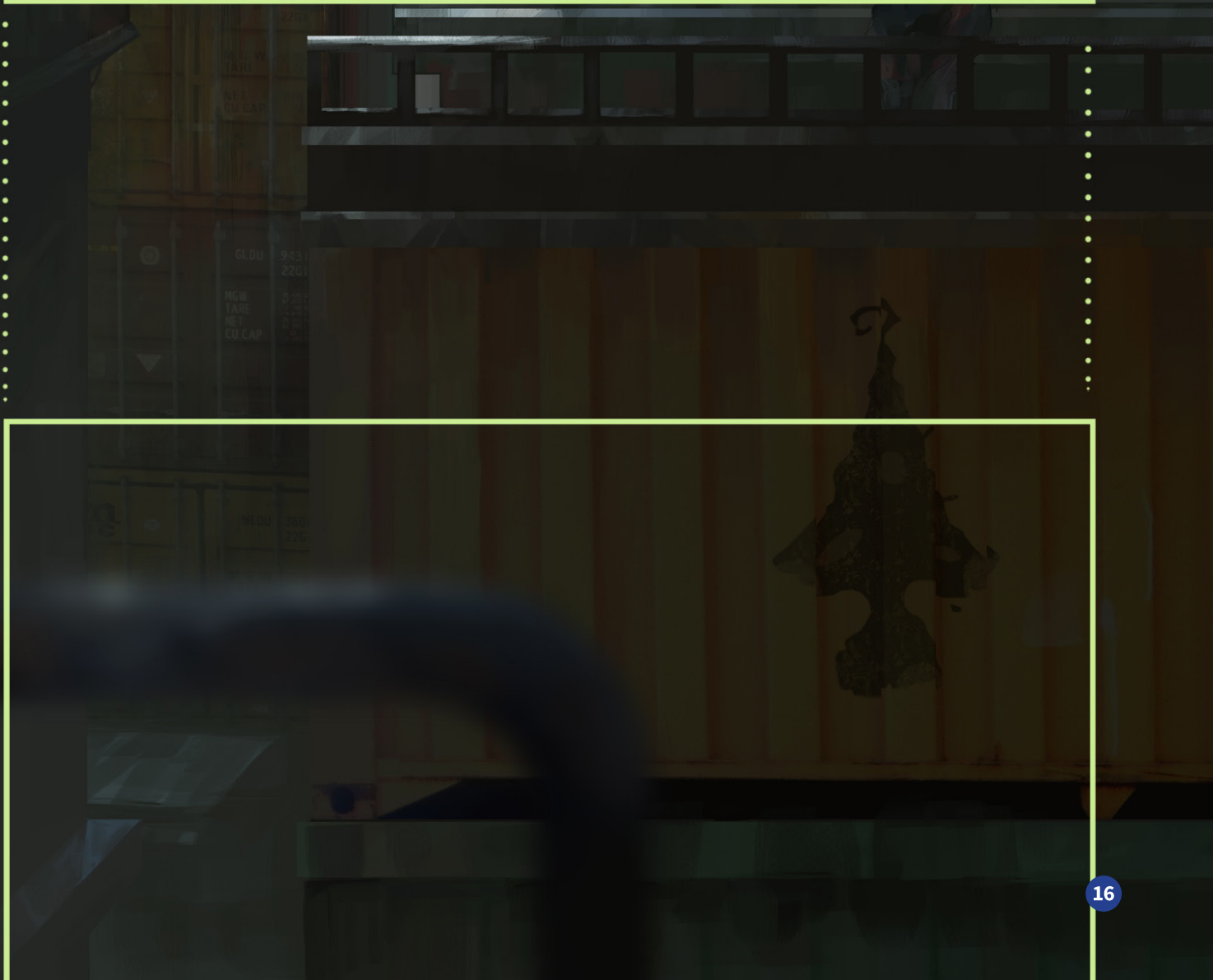
**13 Continuing the same method for isolating elements in each layer**

**14 How your file setup should look like in Photoshop**

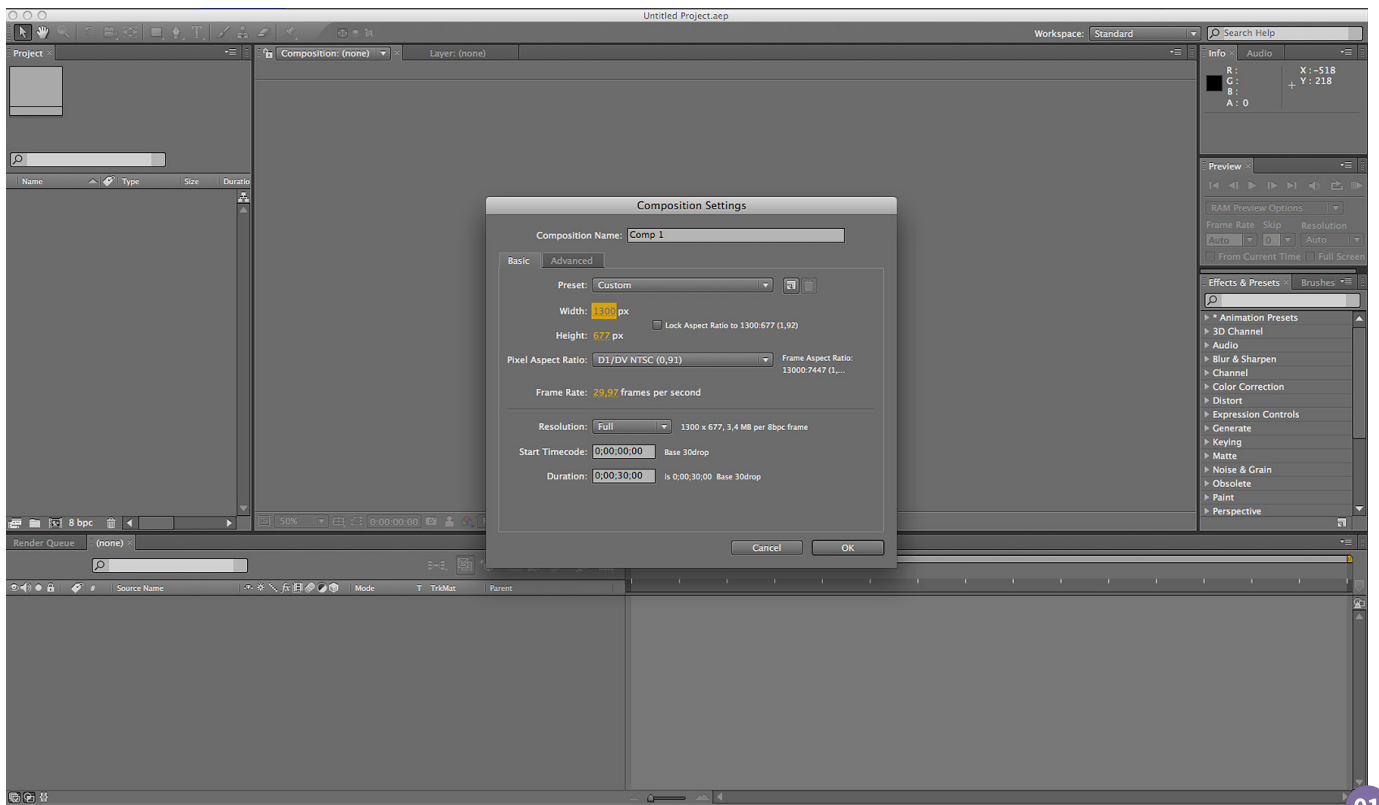
**15 Deciding on the camera movement**











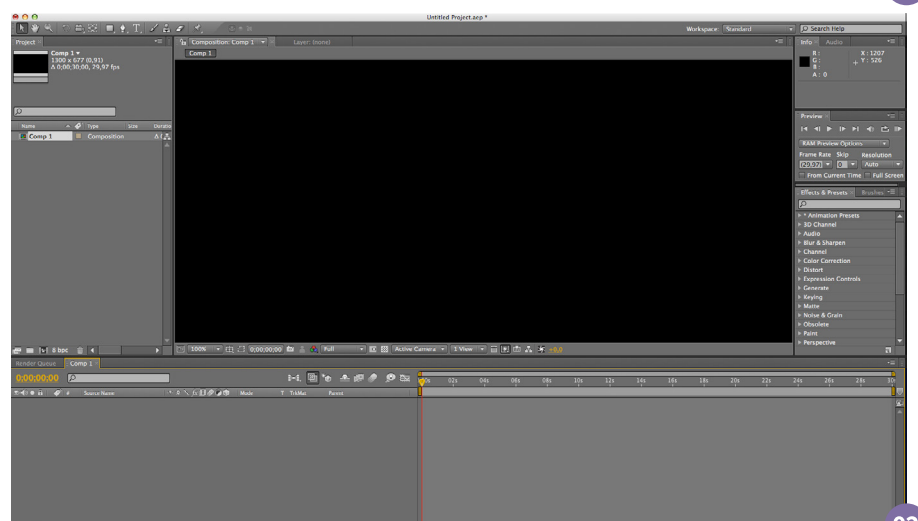
01

Finally! We've reached the most fun stage in the tutorial! This is where we'll bring our image to life and give it a nice and interesting look! This tutorial was meant to be a simple method to learn the parallax effect, so I'll try to explain each step in a clear way to create an effective learning process.

If the name After Effects is not familiar to you yet, you're in the right place. Here is a little review of this powerful graphic tool. After Effects is a powerful graphic tool which is mainly used for editing and post-production works such as audio-visual projects, CG effects for movies and TV, advertising products, and many more. Also, this software has a big variety of effects and useful plug-ins to improve the final look of your audio-visual projects. And obviously, After Effects is one of the best softwares to creating the parallax effects as it has all the necessary tools to achieve this purpose in an easy way. Now, let's get into the After Effects part of the tutorial...

In this part of the tutorial you'll learn:

- Basic concepts: composition, importing files, 3D layers
- Creating a 3D space
- Placing all the elements in the 3D space correctly
- Animating the camera
- Post-production tips



02

## AFTER EFFECTS

**01 Creating a composition I:** The first step is to create a new composition in After Effects. Go to Composition/ New composition. Give your composition a new name and choose the size you're going to use for the whole project. We'll keep the customer settings from the actual composition. We are just going to change the size settings, and we won't change anything else. (If you prefer though, you can change the duration of the composition, from 30 seconds to 10 seconds. This is optional. It depends on your project duration).

The size can vary according to your needs and to the final objective you'll give the video. As this tutorial has just an explanatory objective;

it doesn't need to be a giant file. This is why I simply chose a medium dimension. In this case, I'll use the same size that I used in the original Illustration file (W: 1300px, H: 677px).

**02 Creating a composition II:** After choosing the final resolution of your composition, we'll click OK and then we'll be ready to move to the next level. ▶

**01 Allocating the sizes of the composition**

**02 Clicking OK created a new composition**



**03 Importing the PSD File:** To begin, first we are going to import the PSD that we created in Photoshop. To do this, we will double-click on the Project Window and choose the PSD to open it into the project window.

Now, we can see the file and all its layers in the project window.

It must look something like this:

**04 Distributing the files:** Now, drag all the layers from the project window into the new composition window, one by one, in order to distribute all the components in the right way. This is very important, be careful while ordering all the layers in the composition, we need it to be correctly distributed. Just as in the PSD file – from background to foreground.

**05 3D Layers:** Until now, all the layers and elements we have in the composition are part of a simple 2D image. So now we need to place them in 3D space.

To do this, let's click on the cube icon placed to the right of each layer. Doing this we'll turn our current 2D layer into a 3D layer. Bingo!

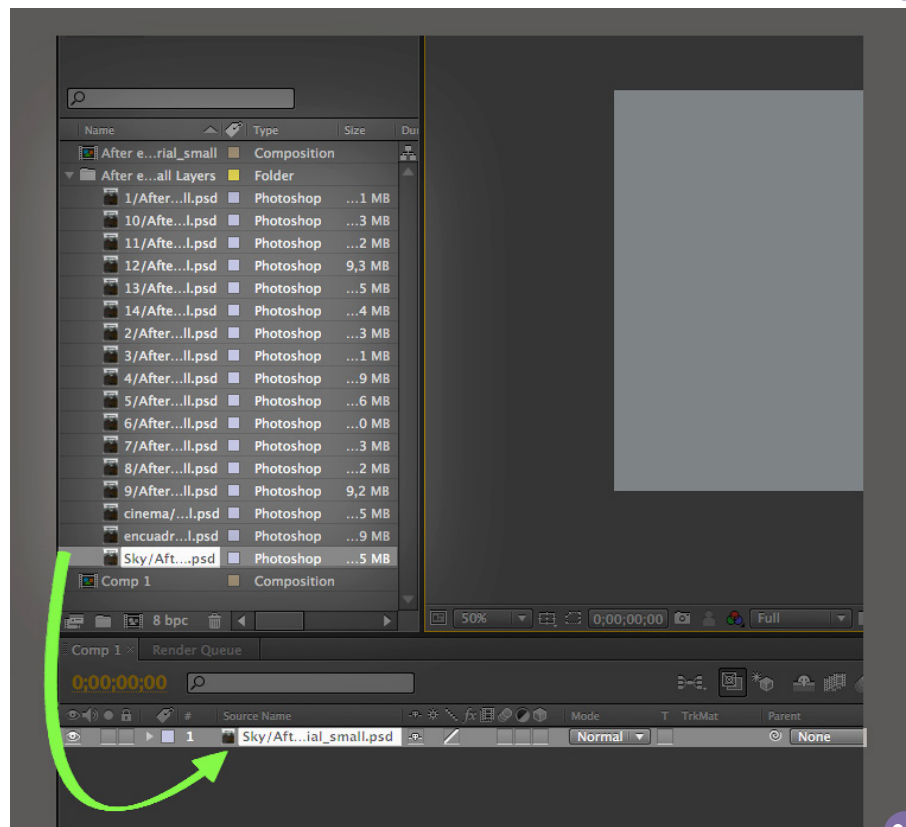
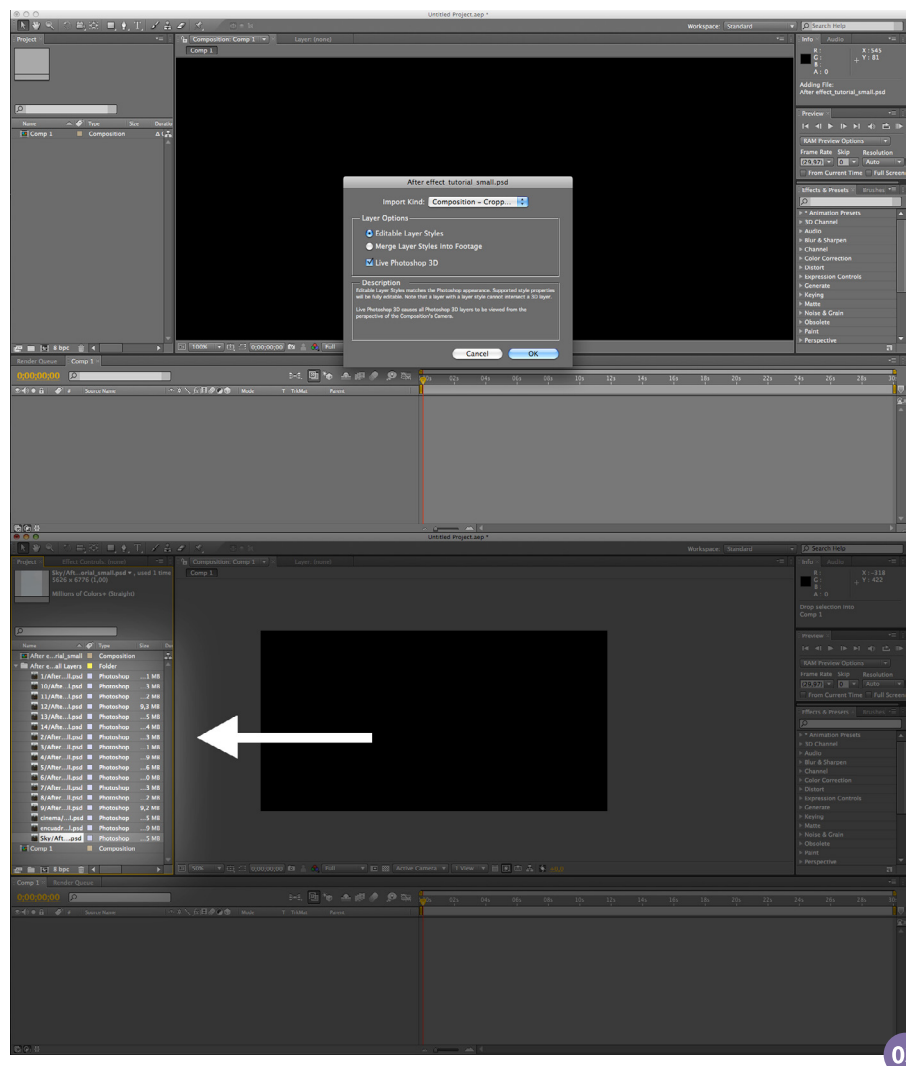
**“Feel free to take control of the software, drag the elements wherever you want, and familiarize yourself with the different elements in the software interface”**

**06 Test the axes:** The 3D layer remains flat, but it can be manipulated as a 3D element. It can be modified, distorted, deformed, or even transformed. You can move along the three dimensional space as well.

Now, pay attention on your 3D layer. Did you notice something new? Yes? X, Y, and Z axes have suddenly appeared!

Let's test the functionality of these axes. To do this, just click on one of the three axes and simply drag the 3D layer in the axis direction. For example, move the 3D layer by clicking the X axis. You'll notice how the element moves itself in a horizontal relation to the camera, always in a linear movement.

Feel free to take control of the software, drag the elements wherever you want, and familiarize yourself with the different elements in the software interface. Once you have finished this process, turn all the remaining layers into 3D layers. Now it's time to order our scene!





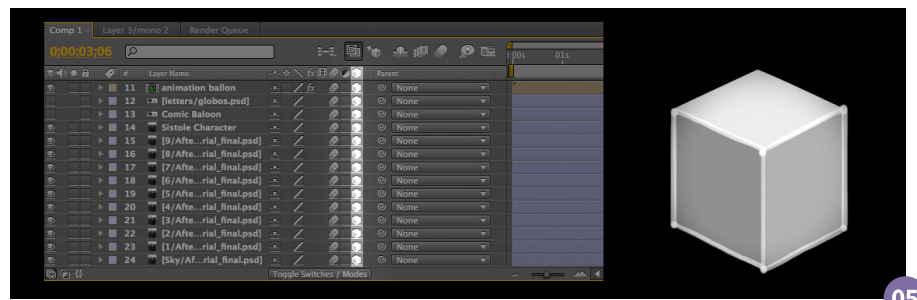
**07** **The camera view:** Now that you have all the 3D layers ready, we are going to switch the current camera view to see the elements from a bird's eye perspective. Do this by going to View > Switch 3D View > Custom View 1. Now everything is seen from an aerial view point and we can feel the depth in the space.

We need to see our layers from this camera view, this way we can estimate a virtual distance between each layer. Remember, this is one of the main aspects of making a parallax; the space and the distance between the elements on a scene is of high importance.

**08** **Moving the elements:** Now, let's start moving the elements according to the existing distance between each layer.

While moving the layers with the X, Y, and Z axes, keep in mind the spatial references that we created beforehand (the foreground, mid-ground and background).

Remember, to move the elements across the space using the three axes: X to move elements horizontally (red arrow), Y to move elements



vertically (green arrow) and Z to move elements in the depth (blue arrow).

Here you can see how the layers look after being placed in the right position. Every layer keeps its distance from the others, according to its location in the 3D space.

Now get back to the Active camera view (View > Switch 3D view > Active camera). You may notice some changes to the layer sizes, it looks pretty chaotic! To re-scale the layers, simply select the current layer by clicking on the element, and then adjust the size by moving the little gray anchor points. Try to recreate a similar composition to the original illustration as seen here in this image. ▶

**03** Importing the PSD file

**04** Make sure you distribute the files correctly

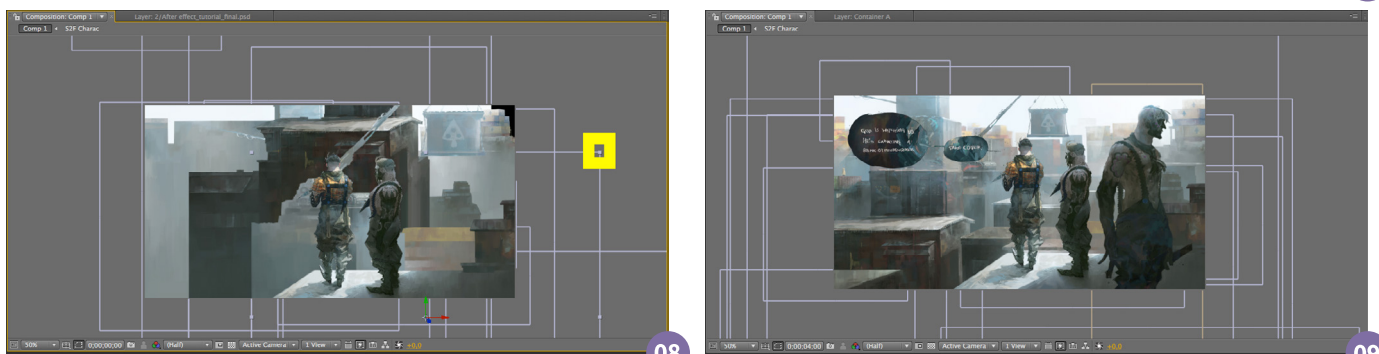
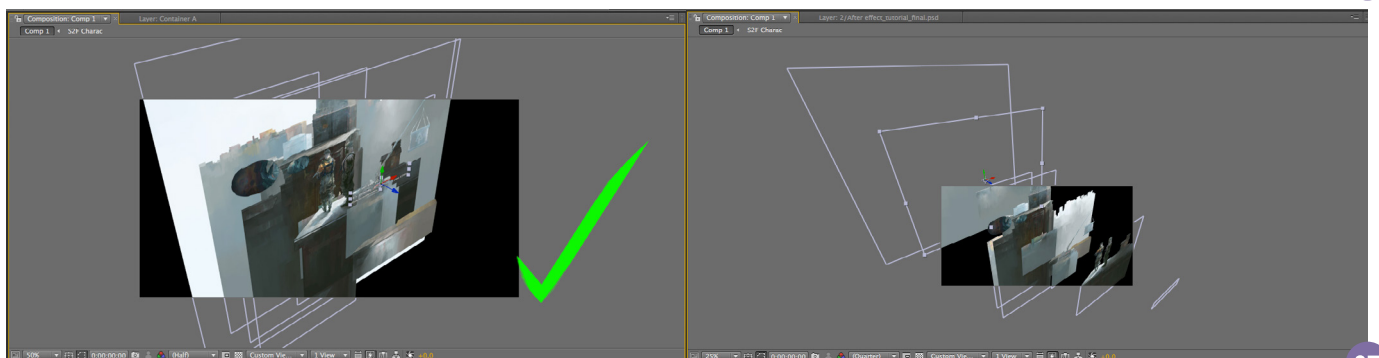
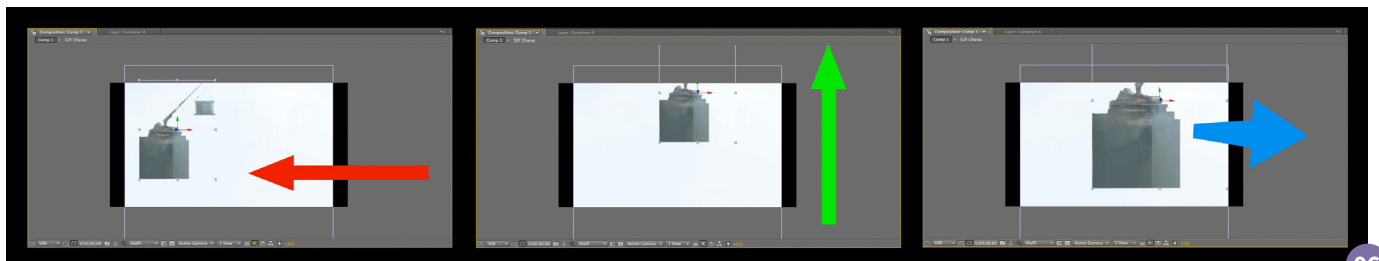
**05** Turning a 2D layer into a 3D one

**06** Test the functionality of the axis

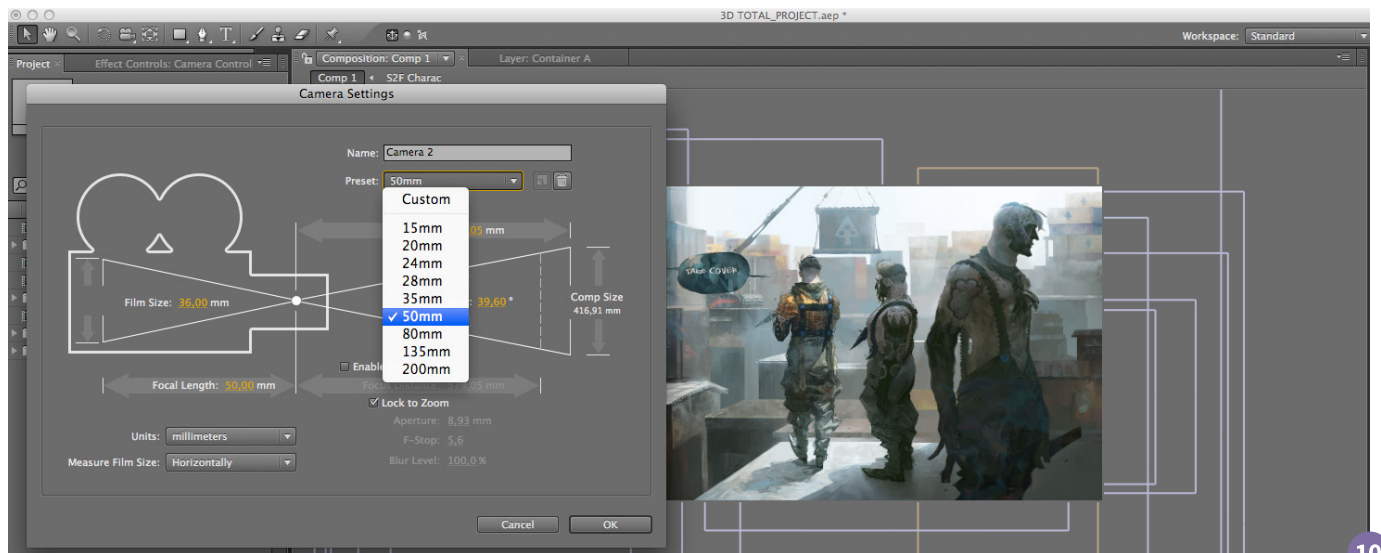
**07** Setting the camera view and viewing your layers

**08** Rescaling the layers using gray anchor points

**09** How the image should look after the adjustments







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**09 3D view:** Now we should check if everything's okay. You can switch to the 3D view to see the overall composition and see if all the elements are placed correctly. At this stage you can play around with distance, adding some adjustments, and so on. Have fun moving all the stuff around until you achieve a nice result!

**10 Adding a Camera:** Okay, so far we have learned to import PSD files into new compositions, create new compositions, order the different layers in the 3D plane, switch to a 3D view and make 3D layers. However, something has been forgotten... of course! The camera!

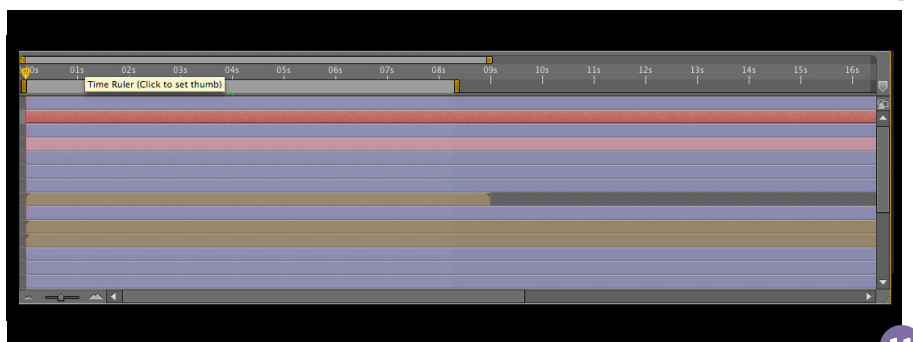
Now my friends, let's add a camera. To do this, go to Layer > New > Camera. You'll see a window with the camera settings on it. Press the Preset menu and choose the 50mm options. This type of camera will be okay for what we need. Click on OK, and voila, there's our camera!

**11 The basis of animation in After Effects:** We've reached the last stages in the parallax creation: camera movement!

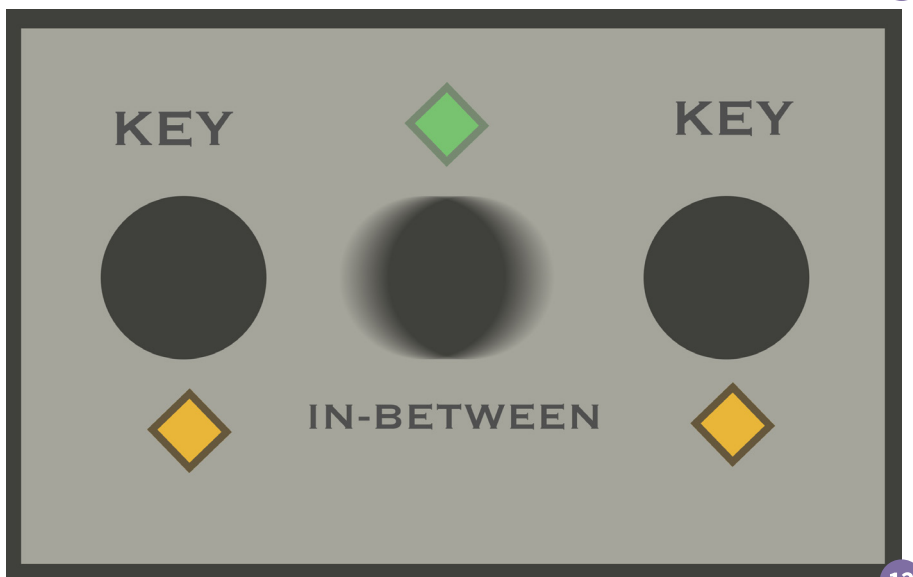
Before we get into this, we must learn the basics of the animating process. It's important to understand the logic of how the software works in animating various elements of your scene. You should make note of the following concepts...

First, the Time ruler: it defines the current time of the composition, and is where we will place all the keyframes of our animation.

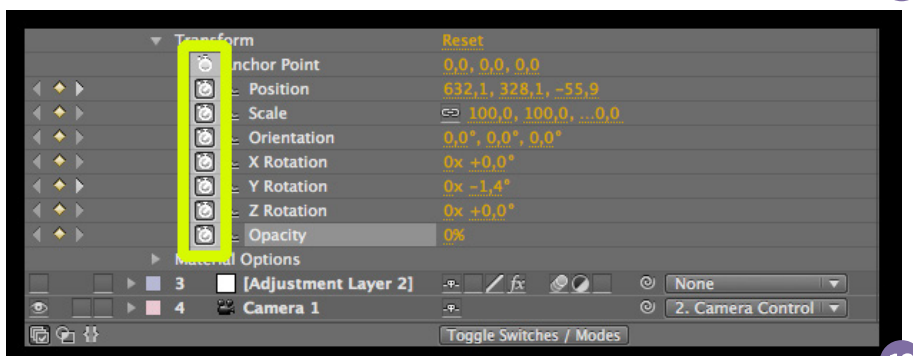
**12 Keyframe:** The keyframe refers to an important point in the animation course, or an important action point that will change the course of the time, mood or position of some object. For example, in case we'd need to animate a ball moving from left to right; the first keyframe



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would be the ball in the left. The second frame is not a key; it's just an in-between placement, it's the ball rolling to the right. And the final key is the ball in the right of the screen.

In After Effects the keyframes are represented by a little yellow rhombus, as seen here.

**13 The watch:** This is the little watch that we can find on the layer menus. This little watch indicates the availability to animate the current layer. Switch on the watch to create different key frames by changing the XYZ co-ordinates, or switch it off to block or erase the current keyframes in the time line.

**14 XYZ Co-ordinates:** These are the yellow numbers placed next to the layer properties. Basically they represent the location of the placement on the XYZ axes, as numbers. The first co-ordinate represents the X axis, the second one represents the Y axis and the last one the Z axis.

You can control the Transform properties by scrolling down or scrolling up the yellow numbers. Or you can just write the numbers by yourself as well.

**15 Setting up the frames:** This said, now we are getting into the basic animating process. Follow each step carefully...

1. Choose a property to animate. For example, choose 'Position'
2. Move the current time indicator to set the starting point of the animation and the first keyframe position
3. Switch ON the watch (we've just created the first frame)
4. To create the second frame move the time indicator where the animation would end
5. Change any of the co-ordinates (XYZ) as you wish. We have created the second keyframe. Now you can begin to move the time indicator to the time line beginning to see the animation movement ▶

**10 Adding in a camera to the file**

**11 The time ruler**

**12 Visual representation of what is meant by keyframe**

**13 Where the watch symbol is located**

**14 The XYZ co-ordinates**

**15 The steps to setting everything up to begin animating the camera**



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**16 Null object:** Well, now we've got enough information to start animating the camera, or any other object in the composition.

The camera can be animated by itself, but we'll use a 'null object' which will act as the controller of all the camera parameters. This option will give us a lot of freedom while managing the camera settings. So, to create a null object, just go to Layer > New > Null Object.

Once you've done this, parent the camera to the Null, and turn the null object into a 3D layer.

**17 Creating the parallax:** Now get ready, because here comes the best part of the tutorial! Select the null object in the menu and go to the red square placed in the middle of the illustration, click on it and then drag it to the right and left.

We've created the parallax! Looks pretty amazing, doesn't it? All the layers move together like a whole mass, according to the distance. The effect of depth it's very nice as well.

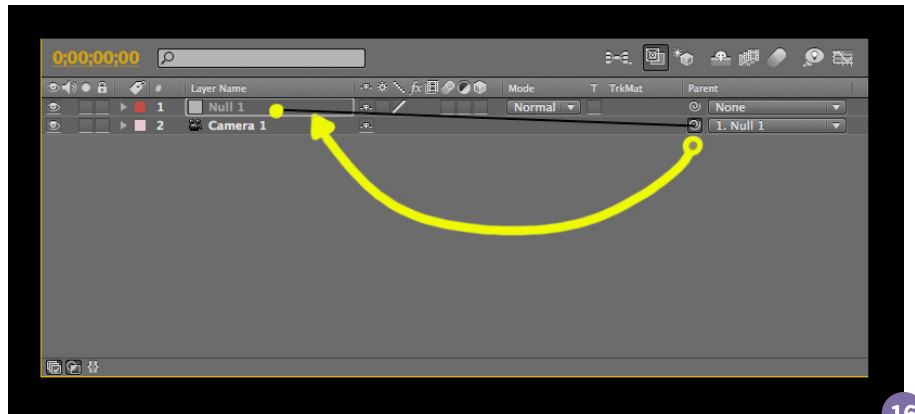
**18 Animating the camera movement:** I'm sure you'll be busy playing around with the parallax, but hang on; we need to animate the camera yet...

You only need to repeat the steps from above to animate the camera. First of all you need to set the camera in the right place. Go to the null object and follow these steps to animate the camera.

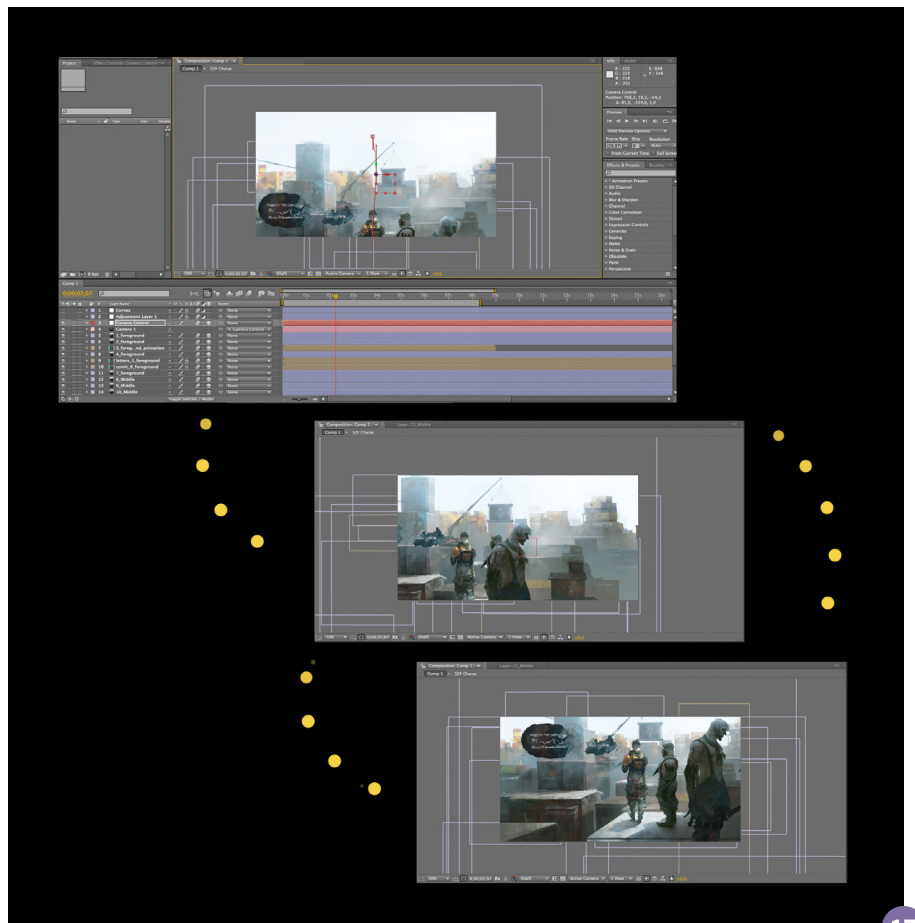
1. Select property: Transform > position > Layer menu
2. Adjust the time indicator to generate the first frame
3. Modify the values of the XYZ co-ordinates
4. Switch on the watch to create the first keyframe
5. Adjust the time indicator to generate the second key
6. Change the co-ordinates to define the position of the second key
7. Create the second key

Now it's time to get to the starting point in the timeline and play the animation! Check the boxout for some simple tips on how to control your various camera movements.

You can create interesting camera movements by modifying multiple properties at the same time; you only need to animate each property separately. For this project, I animate three transforming properties at the same time: the position: Y axis (to create the pedestal



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movement), Z axis (a little zoom) and the Y rotation. This way, you make the camera go down vertically, zoom a little, and rotate from left to right slowly.

**19 Post-production:** At this stage we can add the final adjustments to our parallax, such as the particles effects, the color correction, different plug-ins, and maybe adding some audio would be great too. You can even modify the duration of the clip. This is a personal stage and everyone should choose the effect which they like the most.

To post-produce my final video, I personally add the following effects:

- Curves (Effects > Color correction > Curves): This is a nice filter to edit the colors in the final video. It's very useful to achieve different color palettes or maybe to increase the contrast
- Trapcode/Shine plug-in: This is a powerful plug-in to create atmospheric effects and shining rays. Give it a try, I highly recommend it! This plug-in is for sale, and you can find it in its developer's web page.

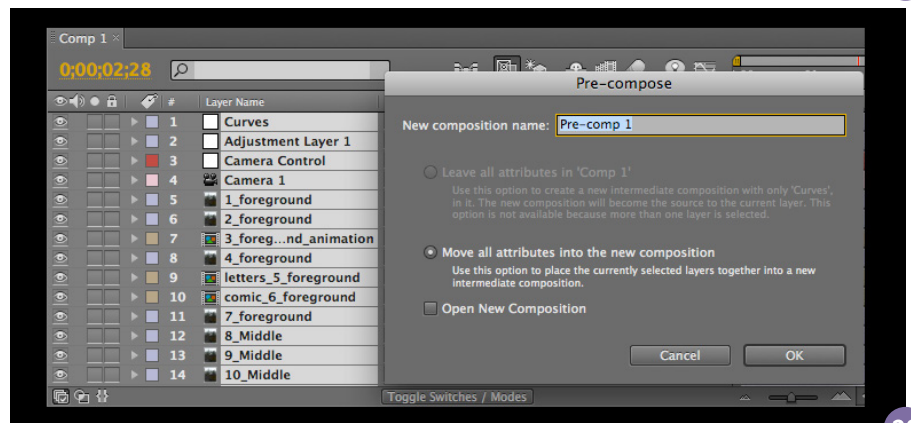
**20 Pre-composing the project:** I recommend that you pre-compose the whole project when adjusting your work. This way you'll create a unique element which could be edited in a simple way via the use of multiple adjustment layers.

To pre-compose the project, select all the layers in the composition (hold Ctrl+click on each layer). Then go to Layer > Pre-compose. Rename the file and click OK.

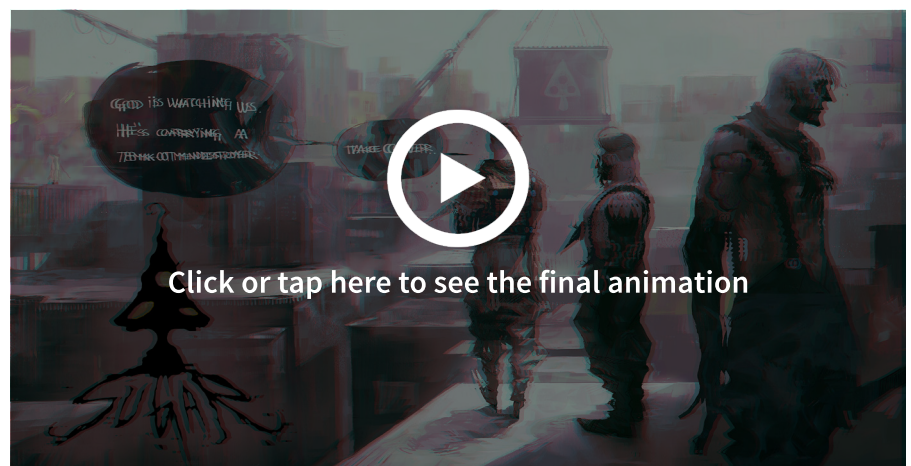
**21 Conclusion:** This tutorial was meant to be the basis to get into the parallax technique. There are a lot of complex techniques to master, such as camera tracking, camera mapping, animation of the character or elements, displacement maps and many more. However, the main goal was to show you that it's possible to create nice results with simple tools. ●



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**16 Parenting the camera to the null object**

**17 Creating the parallax using the null object**

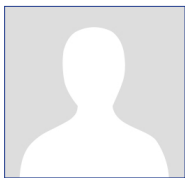
**18 Here is the final animation**

**19 Working with the Curves and Trapcode plug-in**

**20 The pre-composing settings**



## The Artist



**Christopher Peters**  
trejoeeee.deviantart.com

GOD IS WATCHING US.  
HE'S CARRYING A  
78 MK-OT MENDESTROYER.

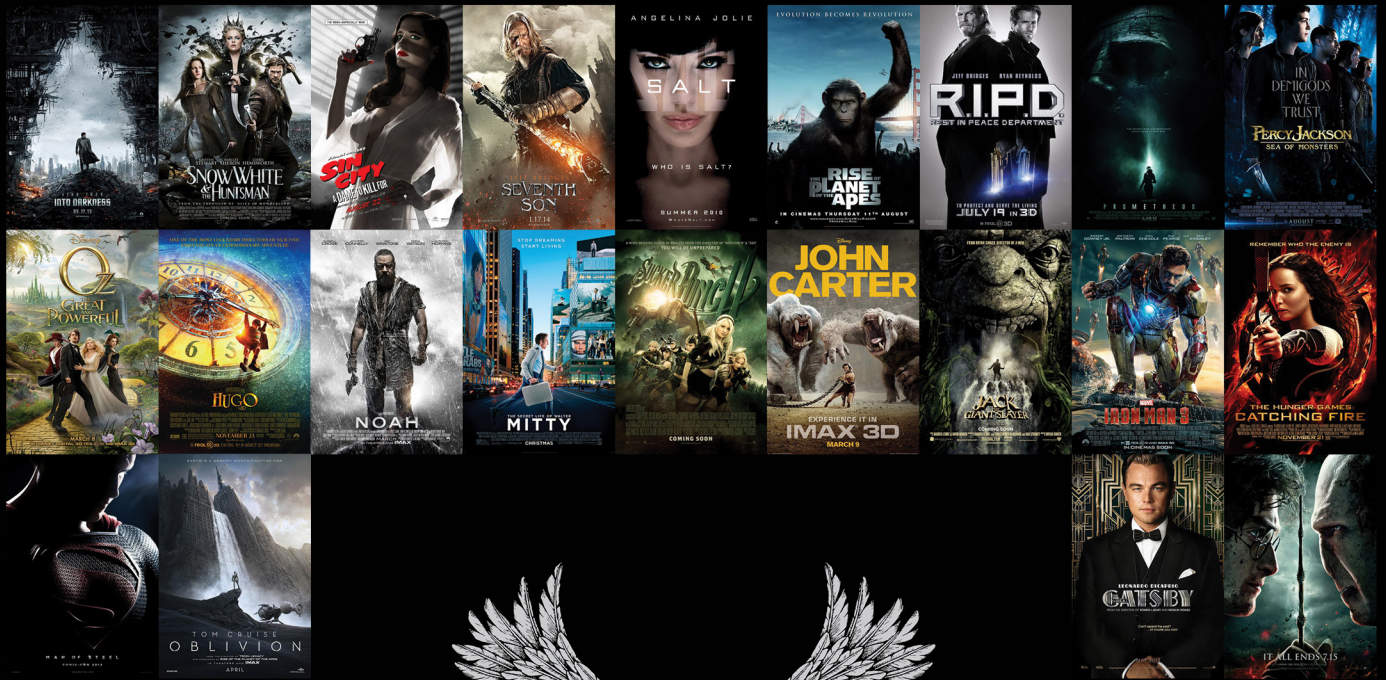
TAKE COVER.









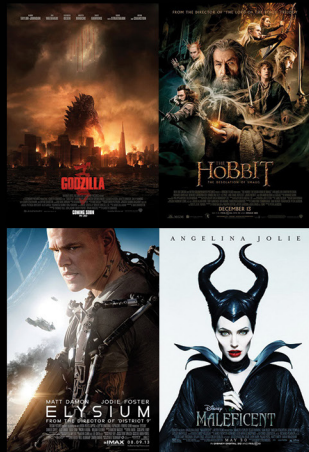


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# Design industrial scenes

Andy Walsh guides us through a step-by-step tutorial to build up an atmospheric industrial scene. He demonstrates how creating custom brushes to stamp silhouettes and paint over shapes can speed up the process; an approach which is great for creating concept art for use in the entertainment industry! ▶





## The Artist



**Andy Walsh**

[stayinwonderland.com](http://stayinwonderland.com)

**Software Used:**

Photoshop

Andy Walsh is a freelance digital artist and architectural visualiser. He is currently working on his portfolio with a view to working in the entertainment industry



## Create an atmospheric industrial scene with custom brushes in Photoshop...

Some paintings will start with brushstrokes and have a fairly loose edge control throughout. In this tutorial however, I'll be focusing on painting over shapes, many stamped with brushes, and going off the silhouette to give me an initial read. This way we'll have our shapes and edges taken care of and focus on how to render them into life, mainly using clipping masks.

The overall goal for this piece is to go from blocked shapes to lit and rendered objects with an emphasis on the overall concept rather than a tight finish. There's a constant deferment to speed and quickness in order to make it feel like a real job with a time constraint. With this in mind, I've taken as many shortcuts as possible while providing as much story and atmosphere as I could with the time and resources given. This approach is great for concept art intended for use in the entertainment industry.

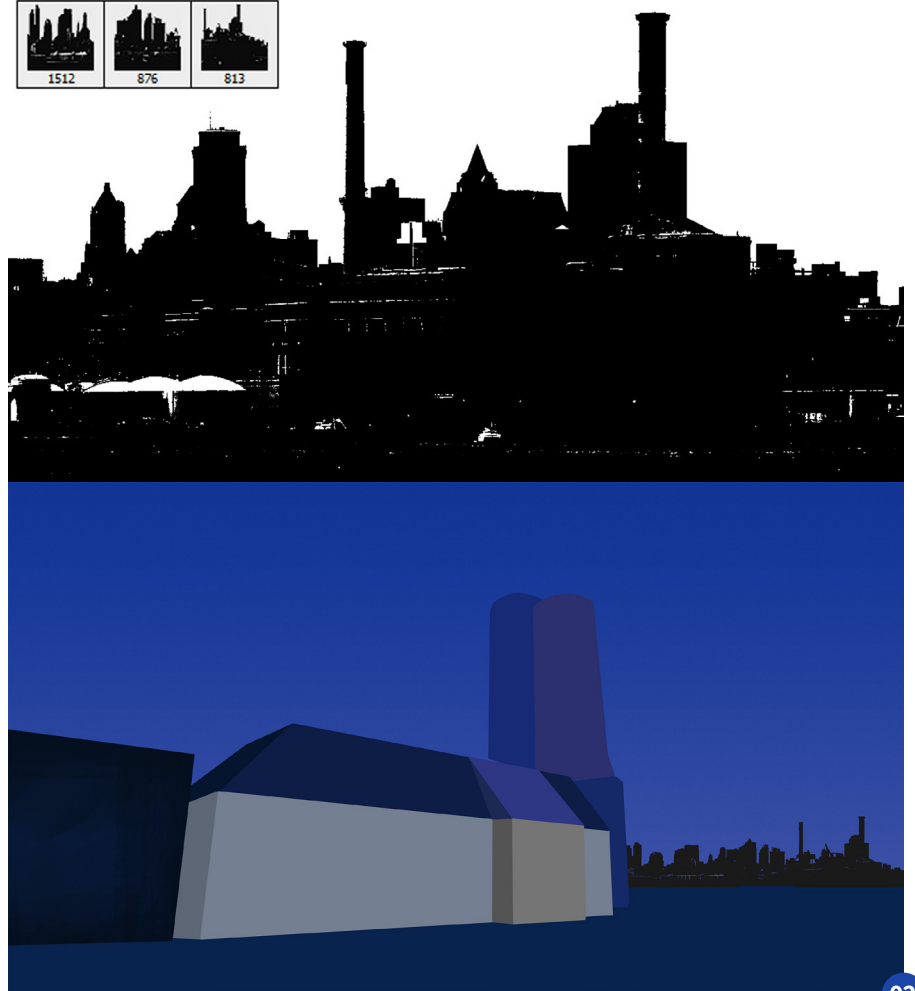
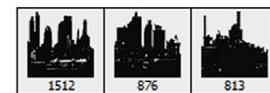
**01 Setting up the document:** The first thing to do is establish the perspective points. When I realize that at least one vanishing point is going to be placed way off the canvas, I stretch the canvas wide so I can see both vanishing points.

This image of the document shows exactly how I work through all of the steps. Even though the rest of the steps appear cropped, the side margins remain in the actual Photoshop document, so I can constantly refer to the vanishing points. There is actually a third point of perspective, but that is too far above to consider including, so we can guess that.

Here I also establish a basic time of day and sky tone, which will inform the rest of the piece as that will be our main form of ambient light.

**02 Overall composition and main shapes:** Now I establish the basic shapes and thus the very core of our composition. As standard practice, our vertical object(s) and focal point ought to be on one of the thirds, and in this case it's a little off. I'm okay with that as I personally don't like being 100-percent precise with my composition as it can feel wooden.

We can always be more subtle and encourage the viewer's eye back into the space rather than force them into that third on the right.



I use the three brushes, Skyline 01-03 to make up a distant cityscape. To create these brushes, I found a city image from cgtextures and found the appropriate channel with the most contrast (usually images with a sky are easy to extract) and then ramped up the levels until it was almost solid black.

In this case there were a few spots inside the city area that showed up as white too but that's okay, we want some kind of the visual noise in there or it will look a little cartoonish. You'll be tempted to ramp the levels up until everything is 100% black and 100% white, but be careful because when you do this to the extreme, you'll start to





03

see some harsh artifacts around the fringes of your brush stamp, so just stay this side of perfect contrast. If a brush is ever not 100% opaque, simply duplicate the layer that the brushes are painted on and merge back down.

For the city brushes, I then simply cut the black-and-white image up into thirds so I can stamp some variation, as they can be used in any order and various scales.

**03 Establishing overall mood:** In the previous steps before this I always feel tense and anxious because I literally have no idea whether it's going to work or not. No artist likes this feeling. So to get through it, I lay down some lighting and then texture to gain more confidence in the painting.

I start to relax a little after doing this. I can see we had a nice industrial vibe going on with some chimney themes and some potential for great textures and mood. Beyond that I didn't really know where it was going to go.

**04 Refining composition:** I add a tree either side of the image to push the viewer's eye away from the edges and help focus it in toward the building. I also take off some of the height of the canvas, so the viewer's eye can't wander up too much.

There is a stronger value on the lit part of the building and we need to always be aware of a full



04

and strong value range, which will come together later. I also add the fencing with the Chain Link Fence brush (see step 02 for creation process). I add a few of these side by side and then distort them to match the vanishing points mentioned in step 01.

**05 Industrial details:** Time to get some gritty detail into those cylinders! I remove the back cylinder and replace it with the brush Industrial01 and added some of the detailing with brushes 'Industrial02' and 'Industrial03' to enhance the silhouette of both cylinder shapes.

I then add some rust texture to the nearest one. The rear cylinder looked flat when first stamped, so I just paint some vague values inside it which brings it to life. ►

- 01** Establish the vanishing points
- 02** Creating Skyline brushes 01-03. The low horizon line and slight upward angle gives a feeling of domination to the buildings
- 03** It's essential to throw down some light and texture early to find out if the composition and scene has potential
- 04** Cropping the height to tighten composition and using the Chain Link Fence brush





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The barbed wire is created using the Barbed Wire Scatter brush and can be done with one quick stroke as it varies size/position automatically to create a non-uniform placement; a very easy way to suggest barbed wire.

I also add some light to the fence. By now I imagine that a car could be in the shot shining that light.

**06 City lights:** Using the brushes named Windows 01-15, I stamp lots of window patterns into the skyline silhouettes of the far-ground buildings. I then erase into them, sometimes on 100% opacity, sometimes about 50%, just to give some variation.

To make this brush, I grab an image from cgttextures, then go into the channels and find the channel whereby the information I want to keep shows up darkest, along with the information I want to lose showing up lightest.

For the windows in image 6 I opt for the blue channel, although all the channels are fairly similar. I make a copy of that channel and go about ramping up the contrast so the information we want to keep is as close to black as possible, and the information we want to lose is white. If you don't go all the way to white, then that part of the image will be visible in your brush. Likewise if you don't go all the way to black (in this case for our windows) then they will be slightly transparent in your brush.



06

I then copy that channel layer and paste it into my regular layers (don't forget to select RGB from

the channels before doing this to get back to regular RGB mode). We then have a decent brush template. For this example my intention is to have





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the windows lit up, so basically anything that's black is going to be an illuminated window on a dark city-silhouette. Hence I remove any lines and peripheral markings before converting it into a brush.

The final stage is to scale the image down to something manageable, in this case from about 3,000 pixels tall to about 800 pixels. Then simply select your area and choose Edit > Define Brush Preset to save your brush.

The next step, to get the light looking less crude, is to lock the transparency of the layer containing the windows (note that they should be on a separate layer) and then take the same window brushes (chosen pretty much at random), load them up with a bright color, set the Mode to Color Dodge and work into the windows. It's good to keep swapping to colors that are subtly different for this.

**07 Adding the car:** I find a car in the cgtextures library and luckily it is in the correct perspective, well, almost (it did need

tweaking). I cut it out, adjust the perspective and reduce down the pixel information using Posterize (Image > Adjustments > Posterize). We want things to look loose and painterly where possible, so we can get rid of the detail of the car using the above adjustment and then painting over it to further add the painterly quality.

A key element to the car's believability is the shadow underneath, a decent reflection and some nice glowing lights in the back.

**08 Mocking-up the focal point:** It isn't too long before this stage that my wife tells me about a cool Stephen King book that she was reading that takes place in a spooky amusement park ride. I can barely remember the specifics only that this image popped into my head, more or less, so I figured it would be a cool direction to take things.

So, I rough in a wooden frame that will support a big old carnival sign as well as a doorway. I have little idea beyond that in terms of finer details, but it is enough to go on for now.

**09 Texturing the main building:** The brickwork showing through the plaster in this shot is made using the Bricks Basic brush and involves stamping some bricks down, distorting ▶

**05** Here I make use of the industrial brushes to add some detail to the chimneys such as the Barbed Wire Scatter brush created using a photo as in step 01

**06** Creating the windows brushes. Close-up of the two brushes combined. Some quick city lights using a few of the window brushes

**07** The car brings the scene to life and now we have our primary direct light source

**08** Scribbling down a quick representation of the fun house idea

**09** Getting painterly noise and textures down on the base shapes



them into the correct perspective (Edit > Transform > Distort), then (similar to painting the city lights) locking the transparency and giving them some color variation. I then erase the edges, and after adding some general dirty concrete photo-textures, the two work together to give an old-wall effect.

I make the roof tiles with an inverted version of the Bricks Basic brush at first, but then I decide to use the Roof Shingles brush, as it is a little less clean and tidy. I then add some dirt textures to rough it up.

**10 Adding wood textures:** At one stage I would have been toiling over this structure, trying to make every single piece of it out of photos of planks of wood, and it would have taken a long time and looked very awkward.

These days my confidence in painting is a little better and so I paint in the overall shapes quickly and then add some wood textures here and there.

This is a looser way of painting and really pays off in terms of effect and it's also a time saver. You don't need to fully and perfectly render everything for a concept piece.

**11 Refining the sign:** Next I find a western font with a carnival vibe. I place this down and then skew it into the correct perspective (Edit > Transform > Skew). I then duplicate it and give the top layer a light color and the bottom layer a very dark color. Then I nudge the two layers apart to create a 3D effect.

Next I paint in some neon bars after looking at some references. They sort of run vertically up and down the lettering. I thought it would be good to make a few letters dim – overall the place is a little run down, so having all the sign lettering perfect wouldn't quite be congruent. I also paint a subtle glow around the letters, and in the final stage of the process I will use a Dodge brush to further enhance this.

**12 The doorway:** At the risk of showing my age, I must admit that the weird light of the door was somewhat influenced by the movie *Killer Klowns from Outer Space*, which I must have first seen when I was about fourteen. If not that movie then other eighties horror influences informed this part of the painting.

I want some back-lit colored fog. That's all I know. Sometimes when you're painting, you have just a vague idea of what should come next and quite a concern as to how you're going to do it. This was one of those rare cases where it came together in



## ⚡ PRO TIP

### Guide the viewer's eye

Composition and how to guide the viewer is part science, part abstract. I have indicated where I feel the primary, secondary and tertiary 'pushes' are. The red arrows indicate the very obvious lines of direction. After that it gets more subtle and is probably down to the individual's discretion.

I imagine that the viewer's eye will hit the fun house sign, possible hitting the door at the same time (also because these are the areas of highest contrast), then travel up into the sky, hit the moon and maybe fall back down because of the left tree and begin again, possibly in a circle.



a few brush strokes.

**13 Adding a person:** I always thought I'd have a person in the picture, somewhere in front of the car or to the side of it. I thought that maybe they'd be sneaking as though they were investigating a crime scene, maybe at the climax of a horror movie.

It's important to never just throw in a character at the end of a painting, because a character is usually the main focal point and you will usually need to make sure the painting is set up around them. If you don't do this, then chances are you'll have a focal point and then some dude standing there conflicting with your focal point.

**14 Finishing touches:** Time to go to work on those values now. I go in with the Dodge brush and get some extra mileage from the brights, making sure that they very nearly blow out in places. This is a great feeling because you can affect your bright areas on a flattened canvas and let things glow and bleed where they need to. The painting is rarely finished until this last tweak is made. I also subtly push the values via a Curve Adjustment. Experience has taught me that my paintings will be a little dark if I don't do this, especially if they're going to be printed.

Finally I take care of anything I may have missed out, in this case some last minute reflections.

There's nothing like a spooky carnival to set the scene for a mystery!



**10** Refining the wooden sign using a combination of paint and textures

**11** Adding in elements to draw the viewer in to the main focal point. Lighting up the letters

**12** The doorway forms part of the main story focal point

**13** It often helps the narrative to add a figure in the picture somewhere

## PRO TIP

### Speeding up the process

If we really look at what concept art is, we could say that it's all about visualizing the idea and doing so in an iterative process, so that the art director can 'see' the project come to life in stages. As such we need to get our idea across rather than our rendering skills, or moreover, our rendering skills need to have an idea-focus rather than merely being tight and finished. So simply suggest, where possible, using a combination of custom brushes and photo textures supported with quick strokes (or vice versa). The imagination will fill in the rest!



13



## The Artist



**Andy Walsh**

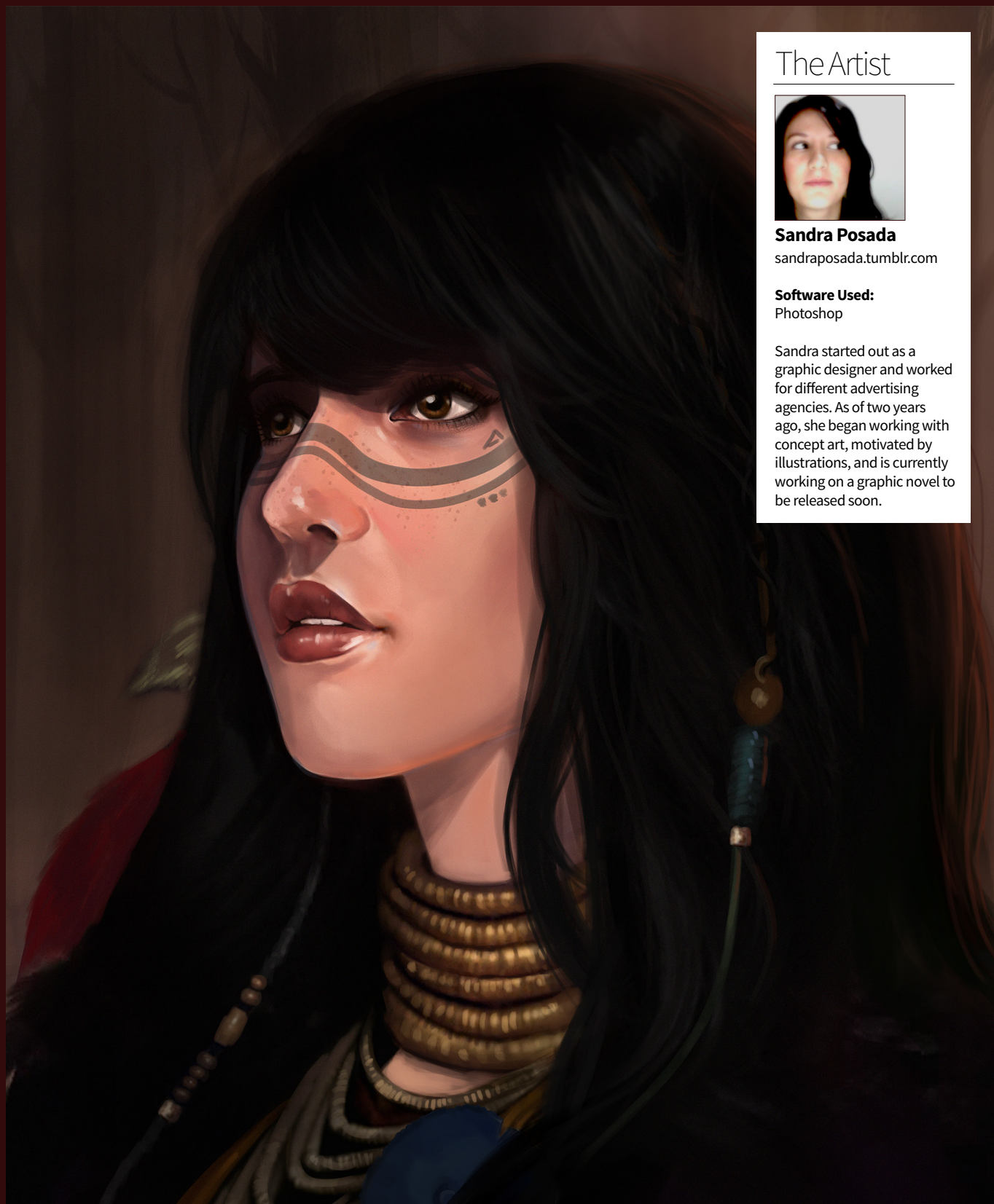
[stayinwonderland.com](http://stayinwonderland.com)



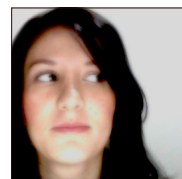








## The Artist



**Sandra Posada**

[sandraposada.tumblr.com](http://sandraposada.tumblr.com)

### Software Used:

Photoshop

Sandra started out as a graphic designer and worked for different advertising agencies. As of two years ago, she began working with concept art, motivated by illustrations, and is currently working on a graphic novel to be released soon.

# Paint fantasy portraits

Concept artist, Sandra Posada, reveals the steps she took to create her image *Nativa*, from the initial sketch through to painting details in Photoshop ▶



## Learn how Sandra Posada painted this detailed fantasy portrait in Photoshop...

My favorite topic is feminine characters, as they are both fascinating and hypnotic. For this concept, I was inspired by the ancestral native cultures, where their beauty is so natural and simple.

The most complex part of painting characters is showing that they are alive and have emotions. For this, it's so important to do prior research to help put the chosen theme into context. Once you have an interesting concept in mind, the references will help you to rationalize your ideas and to focus more on the type of character that you want to create.

To prepare for this project, I looked for some references in relation to this topic, such as its history, a specific point in time, and so on... Going into more detail with the information you have gathered will allow you to have a more realistic result.

In this making of I want to show you the digital technicalities that I usually use for the creation of these paintings, starting from a sketch, up until the final touches are added to the final product.

**01 Sketches:** The initial sketch is a guide that will help you to figure out the composition, the proportion and the facial expression. I think that this is the most important factor when you are making a portrait.

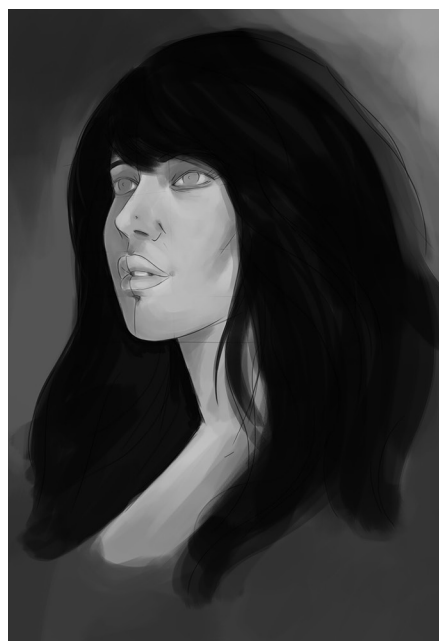
I started with some basic lines that allowed me to maintain the balance, while I could easily correct any errors.

Having the rough outline, I created a new layer on the previous layer, and with a lower opacity I started to improve the lines. This wasn't the final line as I previously mentioned; at this point it was only a guide. I sometimes put a lot of detail into the first idea, and other times it started generating during the creation.

**02 Grayscale:** You have to keep in mind the importance of using light and shadows ►



01

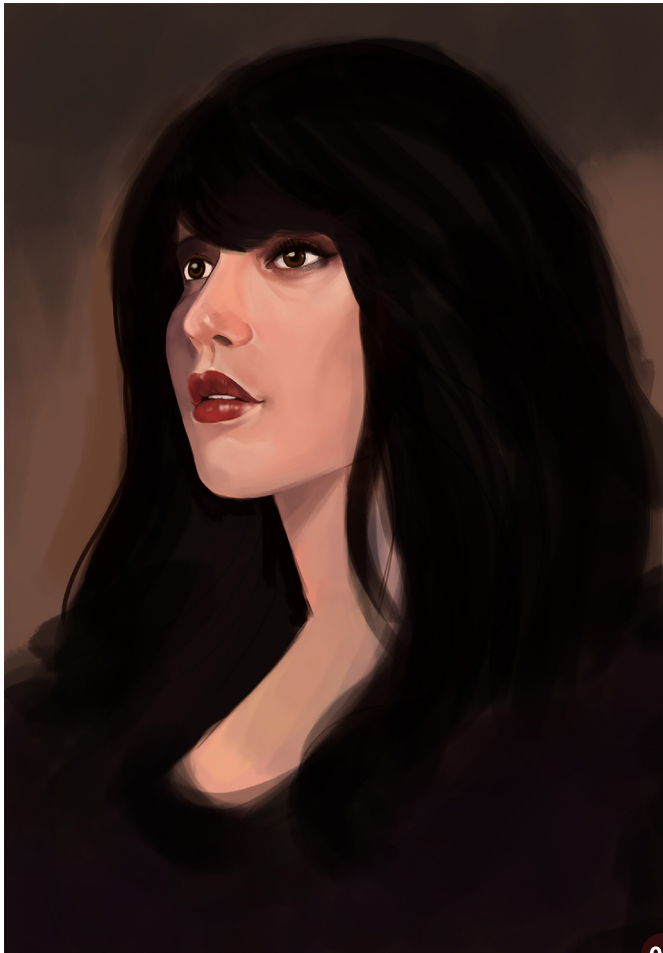


02

**01** The initial sketch helps figure out the general composition

**02** Working in grayscale to set the form and ambiance





**“I like to dedicate a good amount of time to the skin tones, by adding a lot of emphasis on the shadows, lights and reflections in order to get a 3D figure”**

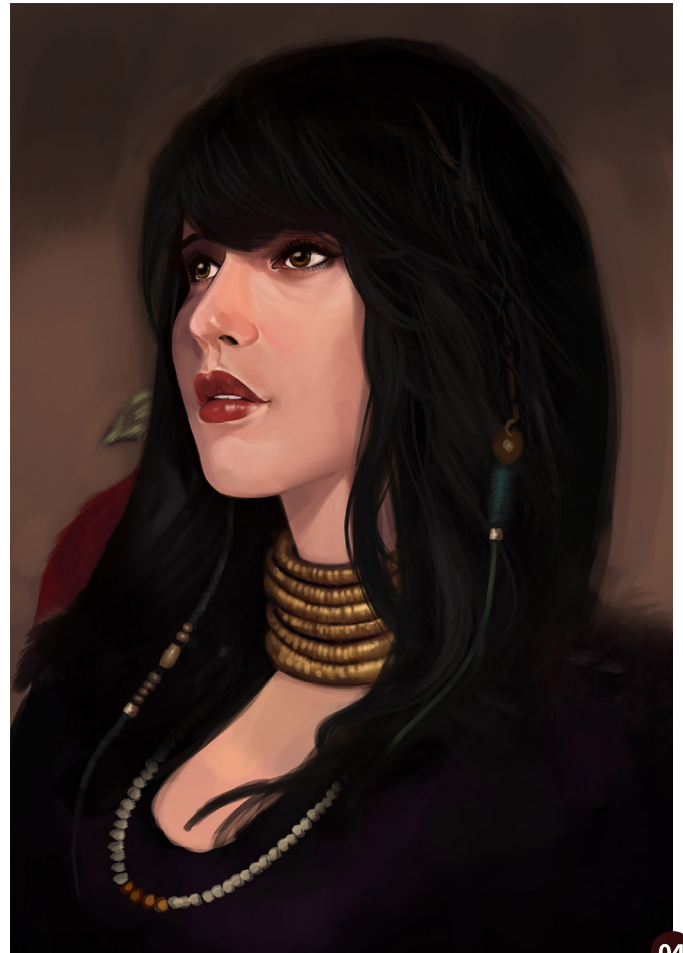
in order to have a balance between the form and the smoothness. The first brushstrokes can be thicker, so that the light and the base color can be defined, then some can be more defined to mold and improve the form of the face.

Try not to worry if in the beginning it doesn't work out exactly as you imagined it to. Have in mind that a good illustration takes time, and that it will definitely look better later on.

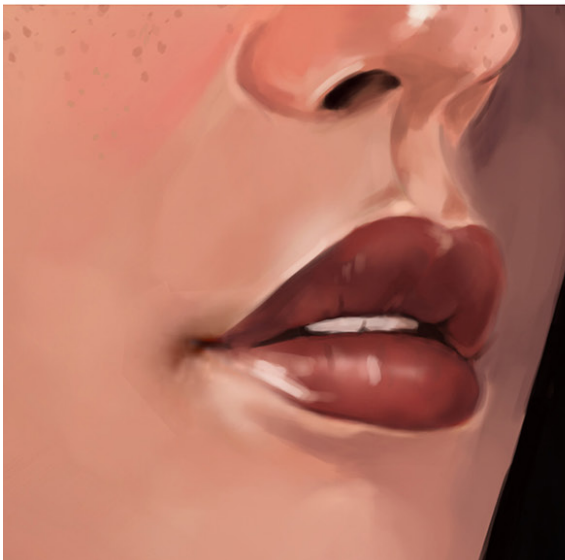
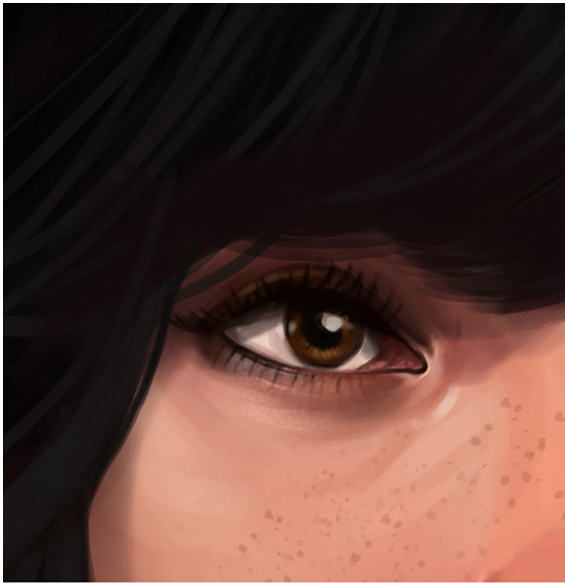
I worked with a plain background, but maintained an imaginary ambiance, and then defined the light source. In this case, I had a main light and an ambient light on the right-hand side of the image. This helped to emphasize the focal point and to determine the appearance of the final image.

**03 Colors:** Now that I had a general overview, this was the moment where I started to work with color. I started with a combination of layers that I put on top, and I also made some adjustments to Color Balance, then I started generating the tones that I wanted to use. I opted for a range of warm colors based on reds, golds and oranges.

I like to dedicate a good amount of time to the skin tones, by adding a lot of emphasis on the shadows, lights and reflections in order to get a 3D figure. I used brighter tones on the right-hand side of the face, emphasizing the brightness generated by the main light. For the left-hand side, I used blue







06

and violet tones that provided more contrast and harmony with the warmer colors from the opposite side.

I drew the eyes with brown and black tones, and for the lips, I used a strong color that attracted attention, giving the face a much more dramatic kind of look.

**04 Detail:** At this point, I started to gradually add the details. Using the zoom function and a finer brush, I approached some of the more specific elements.

With the image, try not to stay too long in the same place, it's possible that you could lose the general balance. If you move all over the area of the art work, this will allow you to see the errors a lot more clearly, and you can correct them in an easier and faster way.

The eyes are my favorite part to draw; besides the fact that they are usually the focal point in

portraits, it's necessary to paint them correctly so that they express what you really want.

Another important point for me is the lips, as they are one of the most important features of a woman. They have many different forms and depend on the physical features of the person. For example, their race has an impact. Because of this, the references are really important.

The next stage was the hair. Initially it started as a basic layer of color, but I started to add some soft lights that helped me define its direction. As I didn't want it to look too rigid, I added some highlights that stood out, which helped generate more volume and dynamism.

The accessories compliment whatever is being worn, and they contribute to and reinforce the concept, which needs special attention. In this case, I used necklaces, feathers, hair accessories, and antique symbols that had a lot of meaning to the natives.

**05 Quick value studies:** It's extremely important to recognize the value of your image. When you see it in grayscale, don't get distracted with the shades – this will allow you to correct the areas which usually may just need contrast. Add a new layer on top of all of the other ones, and set Saturation as a blending mode.

**06 Perfecting the features:** The final stage of the painting consists of adding all of the details that compliment the work. ►

**03** Introducing a warm color range to the scene

**04** Adding detail in the hair, face and accessories

**05** Flipping and converting the image to grayscale to assess the values

**06** Refining those fine details on the face and hair



**“With the help from Color Dodge, I drew more light in certain parts of the face, such as the tear duct, the nose, and the top part of the lips, with the aim of reinforcing the focal point”**

I refined the outlines, such as the jaw line, against the dark hair-color, the neck, the nose, and then I accentuated the shadows generated by all the various volumes.

With the help from Color Dodge, I drew a bit more light in certain parts of the face, such as the tear duct, the nose, and the top part of the lips, with the aim of reinforcing the focal point.

**07 A simple background:** Our eyes are attracted by the contrast and not the light; that’s why I eliminated all of the distractions. For the background, I only used one solid color, with a few brushstrokes that generated some light effects, creating something very neutral that helped maintain the attention to the face.

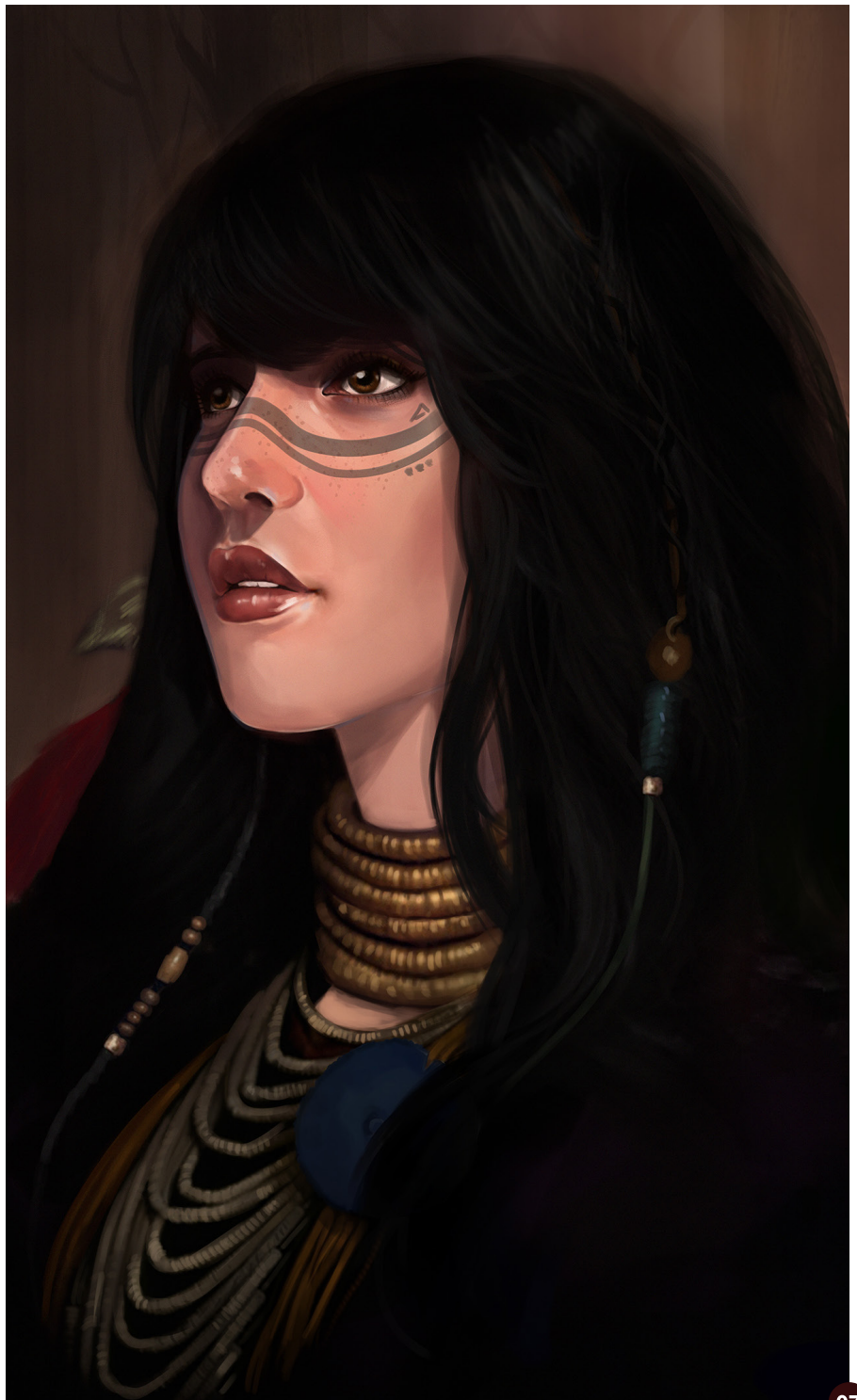
**08 Final touches:** The final stage implied adjusting the general light and color, darkening the margins on the left-hand side a little bit, emphasizing the illumination a little, and making it a bit more dramatic overall.

I made a copy of all of the visible layers and merged them. I then applied a Sharpen effect in order to accentuate the details more and one adjusted layer of curves in order to manipulate the general values a little.

Something else that I wanted to include in this painting was a tattoo, which the native descendants use to symbolize their family values and roots. A simple design was the final touch.

In some points of the painting, I added some pink, blue and violet brushstrokes in order to make it seem more realistic too.

And it was done! A serene face that with its look, opens the door to its soul. I hope that you have enjoyed my first project overview and that you have gained a bit more understanding and inspiration to create your proper paintings. ●



## ⚡ PRO TIPS

### Use the Dodge tool on skin

A tool I often use for rendering skin is the Dodge tool. If you change its range from highlight to mid-tone, this tool can give a nice glow. I use the tool to paint in certain areas of the face, without it looking too shiny.

### Take it easy

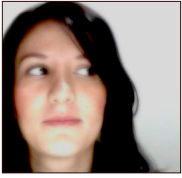
It’s not about racing though a piece quickly; it’s about making things better and better, and learning from past mistakes. You can find this with practice and hard work.

**07 Adding in an unobtrusive background**

**08 The final color tweaks added to the image**



## The Artist



**Sandra Posada**

[sandraposada.tumblr.com](https://sandraposada.tumblr.com)





## The Artist



**Renée Chio**

[reneechio.com](http://reneechio.com)

**Software Used:**  
Photoshop

Renée is a freelance animator and illustrator. Her work as a professional has been mainly for animation projects such as feature film, TV shows and animation for live shows.

# Create stylized characters

Renée Chio's female characters are eye-catching and memorable, but how does she achieve that distinctive look? Read on to find out more about her creative process ▶



## Discover the creative process behind Renée Chio's striking and unique image...

This tutorial will explain the creation process for this particular illustration. Though each one of my works are treated differently, they all share similar techniques and methods. But what's really special about this drawing is the way I resolved some material depictions that I had never done before, like the tutu – taking advantage of digital techniques and Photoshop tools. The approach might not be the most practical for me nowadays (I made this drawing a year ago), but it definitely helped me learn how to use some tools smartly by comprehending the material I was being challenged with.

In any case I'll explain a bit of the thinking process that led me to this procedure, so that it makes sense. Hopefully it'll help you apply these techniques to your own work too.

I mostly use a digital painting technique that involves using only one hard brush, but some materials in this illustration required brushes with certain properties. All of these special brushes will be explained in detail along with the download links.

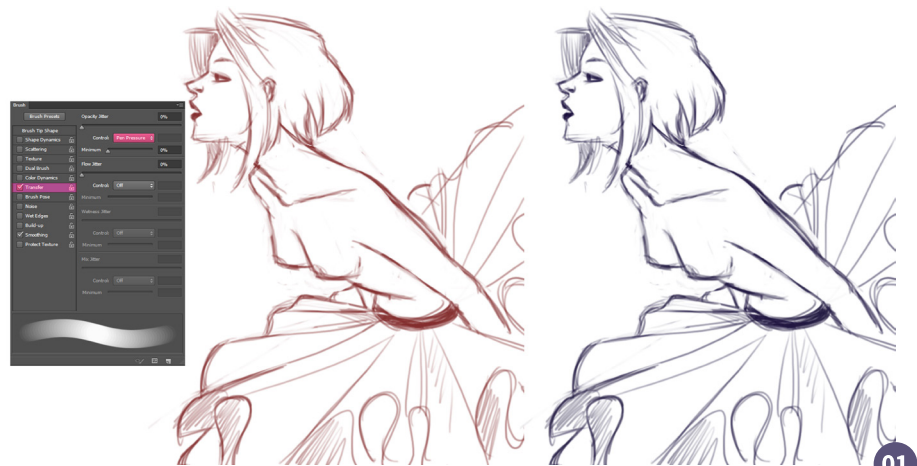
The process also includes the use of some layer properties, shortcuts, filters, transform tools, composition, and color, among other things. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did!

**01 Sketch:** I get an 800 x 600 canvas at 72dpi. I tend to work on a small canvas because it forces me to focus on the important things of my illustration, such as composition, instead of worrying about details early on.

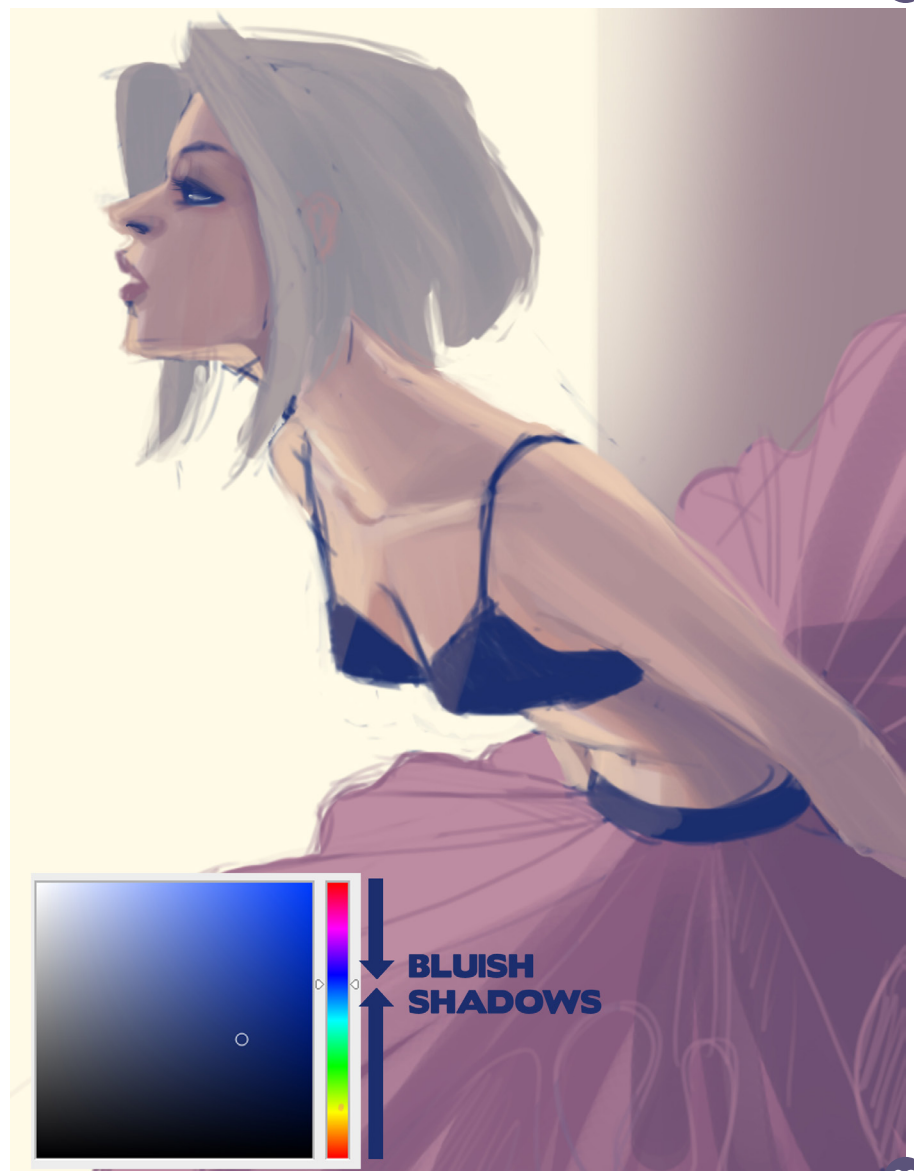
On a new layer, I sketch using a round hard brush at 100% opacity. I prefer to control the opacity with the pressure sensitivity of the tablet (I've got a Graphire4), so this lets me sketch very lightly and define important forms at the same time.

At first I usually use a warm color because it's much easier for me to work with. However, in this case, I changed it to a dark blue because it works better with the palette I had chosen. This level of roughness is enough for me to start coloring it.

**02 Lighting and composition:** I created a new layer underneath the sketch and using the same hard brush, only larger; I started to define the basic lighting and anatomic forms very roughly. The color of the sketch will define the tone of the shadows, so all colors will move to



01



02

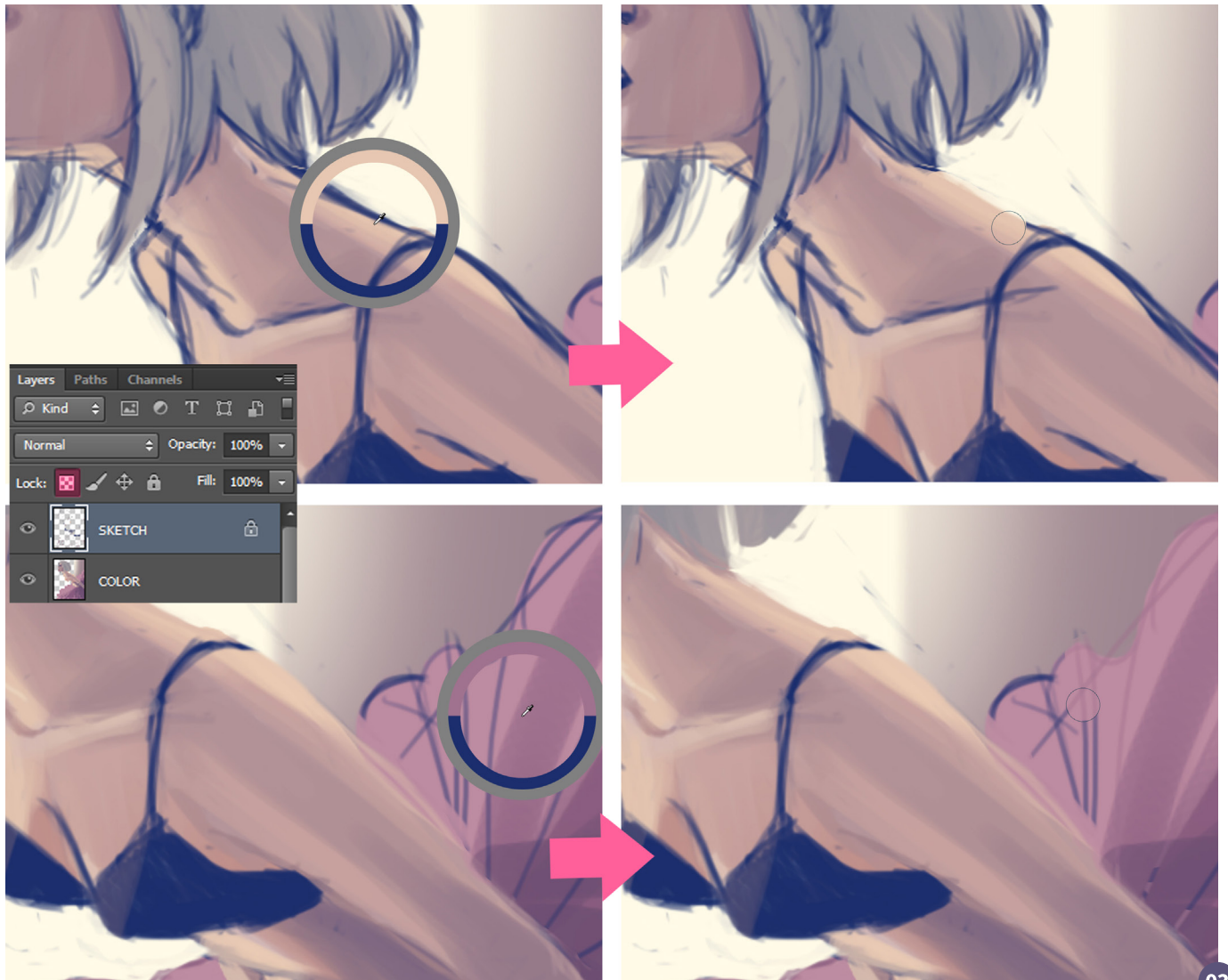
the blue tonal range, the darker they get with the shading. This will make the whole image feel a lot more integrated. At the end, I painted the wall on the back to frame the subject a bit more.

Fun fact: As I was coloring it, I decided to add the bra because of censorship in some ▶

**01** In the Brush window, enable Transfer and select Pen Pressure in the Control drop-down menu

**02** Shadows tend towards blue





03

social networks. It turned out to be quite an improvement for the composition.

**03 Hiding the sketch:** Hiding the sketch is not the same as hiding the layer. I always keep the sketch in my illustrations, not only because it's what separates elements but it's also the soul of the drawing and deleting it makes it feel lifeless. What I really do is just paint the sketch.

First, I selected the Sketch layer and locked the transparency in the Layers window (this won't allow me to do anything in the transparent area). Then with the Eyedropper I picked the color closest to the sketch and painted that area.

There were parts that I left dark on purpose, like the nostril, because it worked as occlusion shadows. As for the tutu, I mixed the different shades of pink to keep that messy look, though it got a different treatment in the process which I'll explain later on.



04



## 04 Polishing the important things first:

In this stage I cranked the resolution up to 300 dpi. Here I could start polishing from the most important thing in my composition, then moving outwards to the least important. Using the same hard brush as before, I mixed colors with the Eyedropper and the pressure of the pen until I started getting a very soft finish.

For the hair, I defined some locks with shadows and at the end I used the Smudge tool to smoothly pull the ends outwards.

## 05 Making the bra:

**A.** I worked on the bra on a separate layer

**B.** Using a lace brush (you can custom make your own brushes in Photoshop to speed up your process), I painted on another layer underneath to make the lace in the neckline, and named the layer 'LACE'

**C.** On a new layer, I used another brush from the same set and made only one color sample. I rotated it 45° CCW and, using the Transform tool in warp mode, (which can be found on the top of the window) shaped it to fit the breast. I named that layer 'LACE BREAST'

**D.** I moved the lace sample above the breast

**E.** Holding down Ctrl, I clicked the layer thumbnail of the 'BRA' so that it selected only those pixels

**F.** Now holding Ctrl+Alt and clicking on the 'LACE BREAST' layer thumbnail, it unselected the pixels on the lace previously created, leaving only the negative space to work with

**G.** I hid the 'LACE BREAST' layer

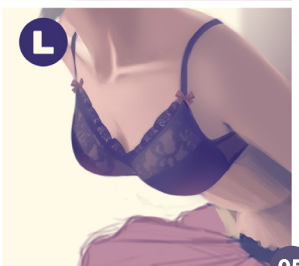
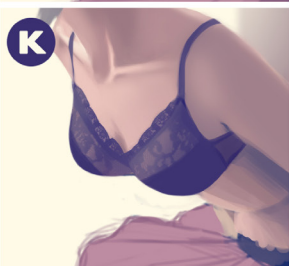
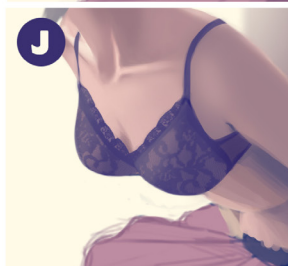
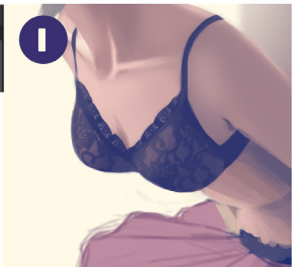
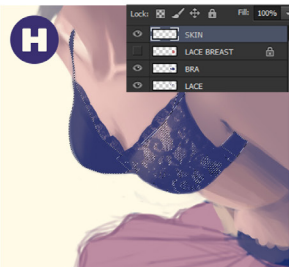
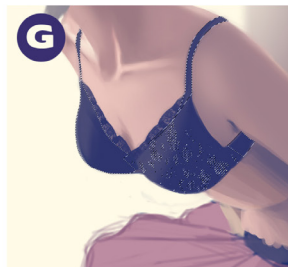
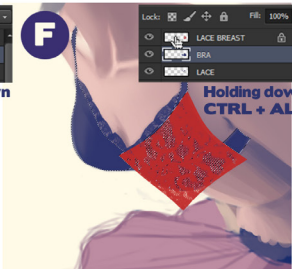
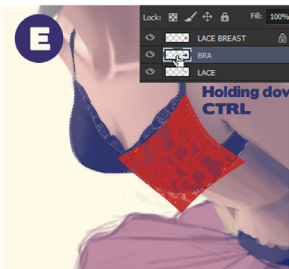
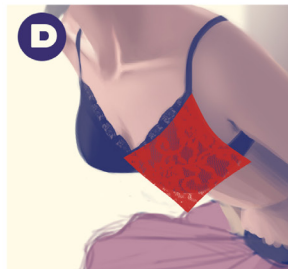
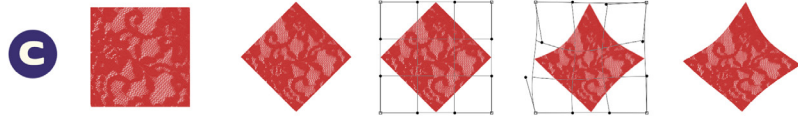
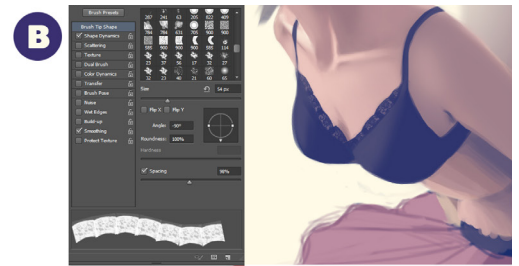
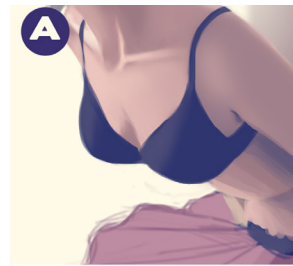
**H.** I created a new layer ('SKIN') and painted the selection with skin color using a soft brush

**I.** I then repeated the same process with the other breast

**J.** I made a subtle color adjustment using the Hue/Saturation tool (Ctrl+U)

**K.** On the same layer, I painted the bottom of the breasts using a hard brush

**L.** With a soft brush, I added a subtle pink reflected/bounce light coming from the tutu, and painted some tiny ribbons ►



05

## PRO TIPS

### Be a troubleshooter

Not all things have been written. They may have been done but not particularly put into words, so sometimes it is a very useful habit to try to figure out some stuff by yourself. Doing so will also help you get to know the program and all of its possibilities. At first you will probably take the longest path to your objective but as you get comfortable with the tools and the techniques you'll find new and easier ways to achieve the same objectives.

### Learning by observing

Whenever I'm not in front of my computer working on some painting, I'm somewhere studying the world around me.

By doing mundane things, going through your day-to-day routine, you can learn a lot just by understanding what you see. Pay close attention to things that you find new or fascinating, get excited about them and learn everything from them, so when you get back to your workstation you can put into practice your new precious piece of knowledge. Don't depend on books or tutorials or workshops, observation is just as useful and it's free!

**03** When using the brush, press the Alt key to use the Eyedropper without switching between tools

**04** Renée spent much more time doing her face than the rest of the illustration to make it stand out

**05** Using a color sample to create the lace detail on the bra





**Hard brushes  
and light tones  
for skin areas  
near the face**

**Soft brushes  
and dark tones  
for skin areas  
away from the  
face**



**06 More polishing:** As I said in step 04, I polished from the most important thing outwards. So, in this step, I'll do the rest of the skin (arm and belly). Using a large soft brush, I try to achieve a softer finish than the face and chest. I also picked darker colors with less tonal variation.

Even if the lighting is not technically correct, this will help the head/chest area stand much more.

**07 Making the tutu:** In trying to figure out how to make the tutu, I realize that the best approach was to make it as if it was a real tutu – layers upon layers of semi-transparent, fine, mesh-like fabric, called tulle. A little bit of texture went a long way here.

**A.** I started by making the sketch transparent so that I knew what area I'd be working on

**B.** I made a basic form so that I didn't have to create hundreds of semi-transparent shapes to make it opaque. I mixed a bunch of colors making sure the cooler and darker tones were in the shade

**C.** Here I started drawing petal-shaped forms all around the skirt using different shades of pink, overlapping each other until the base shape was not visible

**D.** I used a skin and texture brush (again can be made easily in Photoshop and added to your brush library), and erased the middle of each form, leaving a nice textured gradient. Then I went to Filter > Blur > Gaussian Blur and blurred just a little

**E.** I repeated the same process with the other petal-shaped forms of the tutu

**F.** To add some depth, I set the forms on the side in the darkest shadow to Overlay mode

**G.** I merged all the layers of the tutu (hotkey: Ctrl+E) and using the Dodge tool (hotkey: O) I highlighted the brighter side a little (50% on the Highlights setting, keeping Protect Tones unchecked, with a soft brush)

**H.** Using another Gaussian Blur, I blurred the back side to push it into the background

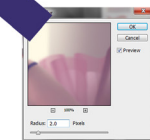
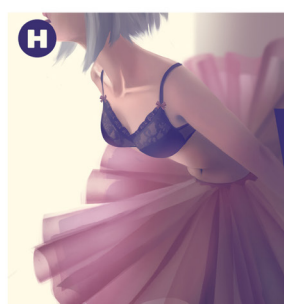
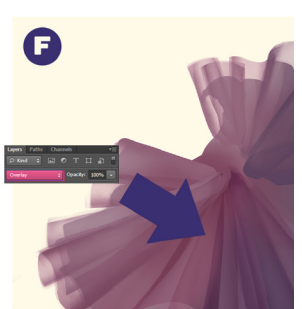
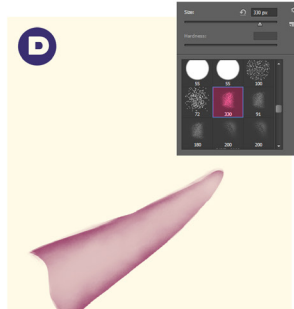
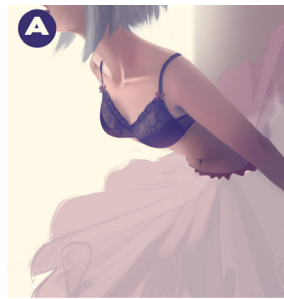
## 08 Background and final touches:

**A.** I obtained a brick texture from the internet

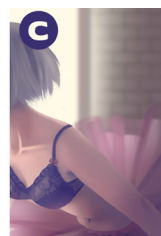
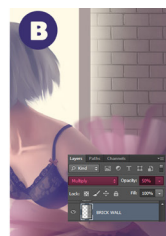
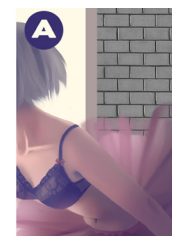
**B.** I set the layer to Multiply mode and lowered the opacity to 50% so that the texture was not as harsh on the layer that contained all the color information

**C.** I merged it with the base color and added a Gaussian Blur to push it into the background

**D.** At the end I just added a soft light around her using a large soft brush ●



07



08

**06** Refining the skin tone using hard and soft brushes

**07** The process of creating the mesh fabric for the tutu

**08** Adding a brick effect to the background





The Artist



**Renée Chio**  
reenechio.com

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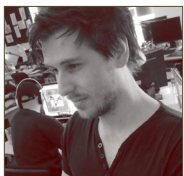
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## The Artist



**Esben Rasmussen**  
esbenlash.net

**Software Used:**  
Photoshop

Esben Lash Rasmussen mainly works with conceptual art, character design, illustration and visual development. He is a student at The Animation Workshop in Denmark and in his last year of getting my bachelor in CG Art.

## DIGITAL ART MASTER:

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by Esben Rasmussen

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### Introduction

I am a student at The Animation Workshop in Denmark, undergoing the last year of my bachelor's degree in CG Art. I mainly work with conceptual art, character design, illustration and visual development. My goal is to become a very versatile artist, capable of working in a wide range of styles.

### Concept

Before starting a piece, it is important to have a clear idea about where you are going. Firstly, ask yourself, why are you making it? For this piece, I wanted to tell a story and create a high quality, detailed piece of work to add to my portfolio.

The story behind this work is about a girl who gets lost in the dark forest. When trying to find her way out, she spots a creature looking at her from the shadows and runs away in panic. The creature follows quickly behind her, wreaking havoc in its path. She trips and while gasping for air, she notices the creature slowly approaching her.

The creature steps into the light and she realizes that it is some kind of giant, humanoid tortoise. It carefully bends down and looks at the girl, trying not to scare her and apprehensively hands her a red scarf that she dropped when fleeing. Even though she is afraid, she reaches out for her scarf and notices that he is badly hurt.



01

At university, I was taught by Daniel Cacouault for a week and during this time he made me think more about light, composition, mood and colors. This prompted me to consider what I wanted from the piece and what I wanted the viewer to feel. With A Kind Soul, I wanted to create some sympathy for the creature and involve the viewer in the story.

This is in the essence of what we do when we paint or draw; we create pieces that evoke

feelings. I wanted to convey a calm, slightly nervous form of beauty – a concept which would rely on depicting the creature's nature.

### Composition

The composition is very simple: a flat side view with a foreground, mid-ground and background. The background is also flat so the focus leans towards the characters rather than the forest. The primary light source comes from the top and is reflected by the snow on the ground. The palette



02





03



04

is limited and desaturated, as I wanted to create the effect of a grotesque and sickly forest (Fig.01).

While developing the sketch, the aspect I changed the most was the scale. Creating a contrast in size between the characters made the creature seem more threatening and added more interest to the

piece (Fig.02). I also added the small branch on the tree to create a balance in the composition and therefore create the sense that, even though the tree and the girl are leaning away from the creature, they are in some way reaching out to him as well.

You shouldn't be afraid to be bold and make big changes. One of the advantages of working digitally is that you can change things quickly. I added his shell as well as some rabbits in the foreground (Fig.03), but later decided that the rabbits were a too sweet and possibly a bit clichéd, so I removed them (Fig.04).





05



06

Patience is key. Slow down, think and remind yourself that it is a learning process. As you work ask yourself, why are you putting that stroke down? This piece was painted using two basic brushes: one soft and one hard. Specialist brushes aren't important and it is best learn to

use the basic ones first. I worked with a maximum of five layers and merged often – you can quickly paint over them and do a better job.

The foreground was still not working for me at this point and so I experimented by including

some mushrooms, which didn't seem to work either (Fig.05). I also added a small Easter egg behind the tree and three small creatures watching from the darkness. I enjoy adding small "surprises" in my work and hope they feel like a small reward when you find them.





07



08

I realized that as the ground was covered by snow, logically the tree should reflect this. I also felt that the creature's head wasn't working, so I widened it and increased his general size, again to create more contrast (Fig.06).

The work was coming together, but I still noticed a few problems. The scarf wasn't the right size to belong to the girl, so I made it smaller in order that it became clearer that he is returning it to

her. I was still working on the foreground so experimented by including a couple of weasels, but these drew too much attention so I also removed them (Fig.07).

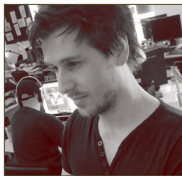
I then realized that I had foolishly forgotten to bounce the light up from the snow. I had looked at it for too long, which can sometimes render you blind to problems. If possible, take breaks as you will return with fresh eyes and a fresh mind.

Finally, I added the last couple of touches and a small turtle in the foreground, which resolved the problems I'd been having there (Fig.08).

I learned a lot throughout the making of this piece and I hope that you have learned something from this walkthrough too. Remember when you are painting or drawing, expect a struggle and embrace it as it will only help you improve. As Yoda put it: "Patience, young Padawan".



## The Artist



**Esben Rasmussen**  
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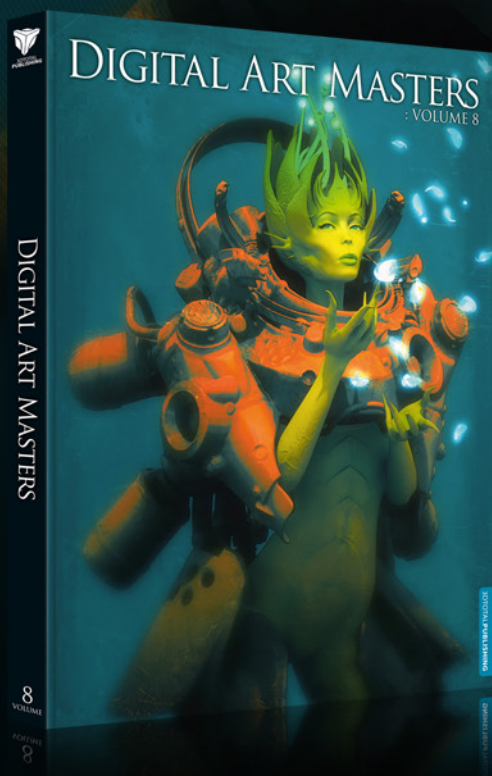
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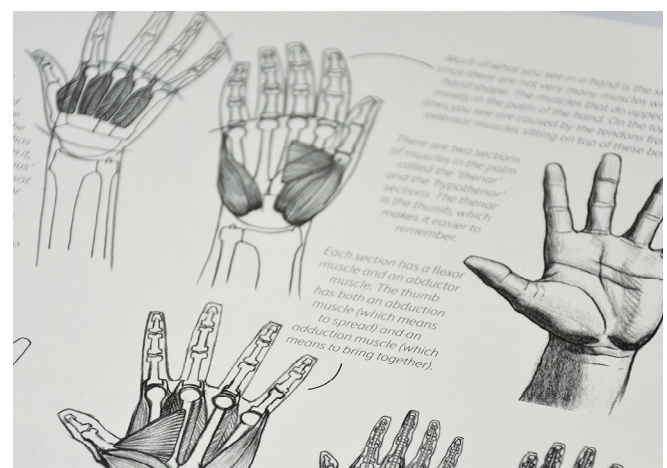
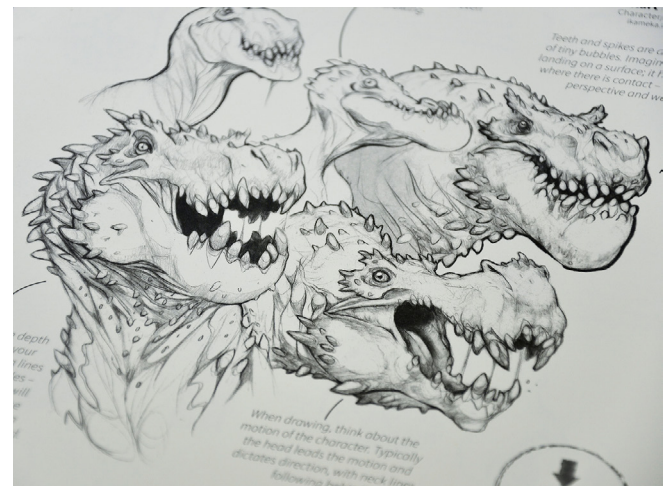
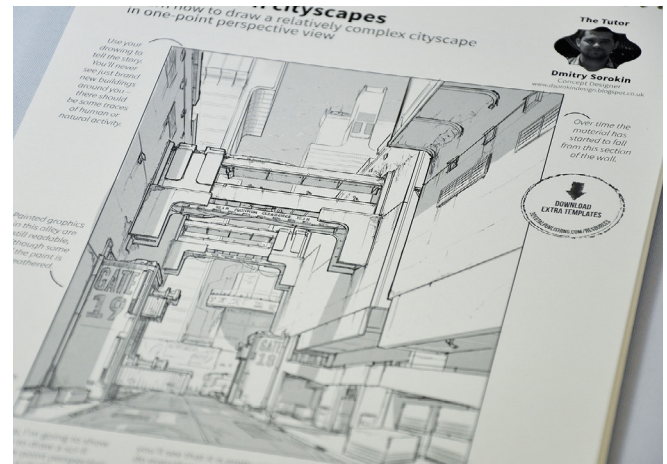
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